The Downing Legends

STORIES IN RHYME

DeForest

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J. W. DeForest (1892)

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THE DOWNING LEGENDS

Stories in Rhyme

THE WITCH OF SHILOH

THE LAST OF THE WAMPANOAGS

THE GENTLE EARL

THE ENCHANTED VOYAGE

BY

J. W. DEFOREST

AUTHOR OF A LOVER'S REVOLT, THE ODDEST OF COURTSHIPS, IRENE THE MISSIONARY, PLAYING THE MISCHIEF, JUSTINE'S LOVERS, HONEST JOHN VANE, THE WETHERELL AFFAIR, KATE BEAUMONT, OVERLAND, MISS RAVENEL'S CONVERSION, SEACLIFF, EUROPEAN ACQUAINTANCE, ORIENTAL ACQUAINTANCE, WITCHING TIMES, ETC., ETC.

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PREFACE

In regard to form the Downing Legends are rhymed "magazine stories."

In regard to spirit they are extravaganzas. They will not be liked except by readers who like such works as the Odyssey, the Arabian Nights, the Orlando Innamorato of Boiardo and Berni, the Orlando Furioso of Ariosto, the Pilgrim's Progress, Gulliver's Travels, Knickerbocker's History of New York, and Hawthorne's Wonder Tales.

Of course Downing is American "manifest destiny" in a whimsical guise. As to an exact correspondence between his adventures and our national doings I leave that question to Congress, the Supreme Court and the American people, sitting in joint referendum.

These adventures will no doubt be stigmatized by critic Gradgrind as incredible, unpractical and absurd. From his judgment I appeal confidently, like any other author, to remote posterity.

Good old Mr. Feeble Mind (well known to admirers of Bunyan) will also have somewhat to say, which will not be clearly understood, and so need not be answered, at least not prophetically.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

The Witch of Shiloh.

Section.	Line.	
2	24	*Giles Cory* was pressed to death at Salem, 1692, for refusing to plead to the charge of witchcraft.
18	1	*Eyen* = Eyes.
21	35	*Flyted* = flitted.
24	28	*Throwed a transformation*. From "Threw a fit."
39	18	*Nipton*. Old seashore form of Neptune, sometimes used for Satan.
42	30	*Shingle whacking*. Spinning a toad aloft by putting it on one end of a balanced shingle and hitting the other end with a bludgeon.

The Last of the Wampanoags.

1	2	*Baldybird*. The bald eagle.
4	24	*Metacom* = King Philip, or Philip of Pokanoket. Killed 1676.
30	3	*Withouten* = without.

The Gentle Earl.

5	11	*To weet* = To wit: to know: to note.
17	12	*Brandon's Isle* = St. Brandon's Isles.
20	6	*A-gley* = Astray.

THE ENCHANTED VOYAGE.

2 20 *Guildhall's demiurges.* Two wooden statues, popularly called Gog and Magog, formerly in the Guildhall, London.

5 1 *Eftersoon* = aftersoon; soon after.

6 34 Skinners=Tory cow-thieves.

19 16 Yore ago = Long ago.

22 6 *Shooken hands.* Surviving in country usage fifty or sixty years ago.

27 11 *Span* = Spun; whirled. "When Adam delved and Eve span."

30 12 *Ben.* Disused form of *are.*

PRELUDE

Ah, who would doubt that blessed ghosts
  Do often comfort woful men?
Ah, who would hold that seraph hosts
  Are never plain to mortal ken?
I gladly think that souls forgiven
  Glide often through this sinful den,
And longing gaze where clouds are riven
To watch the angels float from Heaven.

Nor less in whistling nights of storm
  I lean to hear the elfin lays;
Or half behold some sheeted form
  Approaching through the bosky ways;
Or, marking eyes of owlet brighten,
  I know the vampyre's deadly gaze;
Or, hearing sound of footsteps heighten,
I turn to face some hell-born Titan.

But ah, how feeble is my sight!
  Our fathers could not choose but spy
The things I follow day and night
  With doubting heart and baffled eye.
They saw the upper world and under,
  The saintly cohorts gleaming high,
The gates of glory wheeled asunder,
The Lord of glory clothed in thunder.

And, near at hand, Creation's blot,
They saw the crew of Endless Wail,
The wicked dead who slumber not,
The warlock dancing in the dale,
The wizard Lapp, the troll of Sweden,
The gory ghoul, the vampyre pale,
The awful princes hurled from Eden,
And all the murky brood they lead on.

No doubt the wonderworld is gone;
'Tis farther than the Milky Way.
Afreet is fled, and troll, and faun,
And gleesome elf, and kindly fay;
And those who knew them fierce or tender
Are turned to long-forgotten clay:
But oh, has life so wild a splendor
As when the Hebrew sought to Endor?

As when the triton clove the wave,
The naiad twined her golden hair,
The satyr haunted copse and cave,
And griffins sparkled through the air?
When Dionysus piped to dances,
And Ceres smiled behind the share?
When Ares led the leveled lances,
And Phoebus voiced the sybil's trances?

They died; all died; then lived again.
The names were new, the creatures old.
The mermaid trolled the syren strain,
The lorelei combed the sylphic gold;

The wizard stepped the bacchic measure;
  The brownie trode the satyr's wold;
The dragon watched the griffin's treasure;
Pan, king of fairies, wrought his pleasure.

Another change! The life is fled
  Anew from mountain, grove and stream.
The gods and fays alike are dead.
  Man recollects them as a dream,
What oldwife bows before the lares?
  What prophet sees the seraphs gleam?
What chieftain calls on haughty Ares?
Who fears the elves or loves the fairies?

If any wight should stammer tale
  Of times when Hell and Paradise
Were not as yet beyond the veil,
  But near and clear to human eyes,
I marvel much if men would hail him
  With cheering welcome in their guise,
Or stop the wincing ear and scale him
To Pandemonium's inky Baalim.

Yet certain gnomes of olden time
  Have haunted long my bosom's hearth,
Attuning flimsy pipes of rhyme
  To fyttes of weirdly woe or mirth,
Unwilling guests who strive and clamor
  To errant forth and pester earth
With limping lays of bygone glamor,
Perchance withouten sense or grammar.

I bid them go; I bid them hurtle.
  Go forth, ye sprites of buried ages!
Go seek the olive, or the myrtle,
  On fairy steeds of printed pages;
Go where the critic barbs his arrow,
  And where the red reviewer rages;
Go ride your raid and hush your haro
In storied urn or stoneless barrow!

THE WITCH OF SHILOH

THE DOWNING LEGENDS

I

THE WITCH OF SHILOH

I

The night was marvelous to hear;
  It had a strangely mingled mell.
It bellowed like a raging mere;
  It hissed with flights of spirits fell.
The night was like a demon's dream,
  (A demon dreaming deep in hell),
A dream of blast and roar and gleam
And formless horror throned supreme.

If ever demons dream, I think
  They surely dream on such a night.
The sky was like a sky of ink;
  The lightning could not give it light.
It seemed as though a dragon whirled
  Gigantic wings athwart the sight;
As though an endless dragon curled
His wings and talons round the world.

I think that surely monsters flew
  That night to tear our feeble earth;
I think that surely Satan blew
  His trumpet round creation's girth;

And every evil creature heard;
The black cat bounded from the hearth,
The he-goat leaped, the owlet whirred,
The goblin flapped, the wizard spurred.

Around the gallows-tree they came,
Around the pirate's corse they flung;
They danced a dance without a name,
They sang a song in unknown tongue.
The demons capered, great and small;
The witches capered, old and young;
And, smirking through his iron thrall,
The dead man capered over all.

II

Immortal Downing! Only he
Might brave the darkness, rain and thunder
To reach the haunted gallows-tree
And drive the weirdly swarm from under.
But Adam Downing stood for more
Than any common valiant spirit;
His patriarchal essor bore
The germ of Yankee might and merit.
A demiurge, a type, a fate,
Precursor of a coming nation,
His heart was pure, his aim was straight,
His sabre-stroke, predestination;
And therefore might be fare alone
To seek the prancing Endor rabble
And smite it unto coasts unknown
As fast as broom and goat could scrabble.

Thus much of argument is meet
Before the muses pour their coffers
Of magic pearls beneath the feet
Of scientists and other scoffers.
For many, mired in sloughs of doubt,
Presume to scorn the wondrous story,
And swear that witchcraft dribbled out
When Salem flattened Goodman Cory.
But we who hold what elders told,
We know from Downing's Commentaries
That Satan troubled Shiloh's fold
With spooks and spunkies thick as berries;
That wizard bites and pricks and stitches
Were commoner than coughs and sneezing,
And those who least believed in witches
Were most perplexed with hellish teasing.

III

Mid levin gleam and thunder rattle
Our hero fought his parlous battle;
He routed Satan's hideous minions
And strowed the ways with demon-pinions,
With mangled goat and broomstick broken,
Chaldean scroll and wizard token;
He chased the myriad mongrel muddle
Through dripping wold and splashing puddle
Till not an imp could raise a bellow
And not a warlock find his fellow;
In short, he quelled the magian revel
And spoiled the picnic of the devil.

Then, panting from his godlike labor,
He sheathed his yard or two of sabre
And homeward through the darkness stumbled.
Rude march! The thunder-billows rumbled;
The lightning shot demoniac flashes,
As though 'twould scorch the skies to ashes;
The sheeted flurries hissed and rattled
Like volleys poured by ranks embattled;
The earth was mud, the air was water,
And Downing streaming like an otter.
But while he toiled through mud and mystery,
The dampest hero known to history,
He chanced to spy beneath a thicket
A damsel crouching like a cricket,
A lassie weird in garb and feature,
Who seemed to him a wizard creature.
One leap! a panther leap! He caught her,
And homeward on his shoulder brought her.

IV

A child the captive seemed to him,
Or scarcely more—a half-ripe maiden;
But fierce of temper, strong in limb,
And Downing traveled heavy laden.
Moreover, all around, a swarm
Of sombre phantoms beat and bayed;
Yea, many lords of night and storm
Arrived to aid the elfin maid;
Now clutching her athwart the brumes,
And pulling here and pushing there;

Now lifting her on mighty plumes
Till Downing fairly walked in air;
Now twining vines across his way
And plunging him aslant in mire;
Now deftly leading him astray
With dodging wisps of fairy fire.
And all the while they called a name,
The Tyrian name of Yesebel,
Or uttered titles weirdly sweet,
Becoming high born eldritch dame;
Or showered kisses on her feet
And pleaded, "Come, O Damozel!"
As 't were a dauphiness of hell.
But, drawing near to Downing's roof,
A change befel the stormy glamor;
The shoal of phantoms swerved aloof
And wailing shuddered through its clamor,
As though eolian darkness cried
Its hate and fear of coming dawn,
Or souls of wildernesses sighed
Adieu to dryad, sylph and faun;
And when our sturdy champion bore
The captive through his cottage door,
Unearthly shadows backward drew
And midnight poured a last adieu.
"Farewell;" its voices seemed to wail.
"Farewell, O queen of night and gale!
Farewell till womanhood shall yearn,
And all your pulses cry, Return!"

V

No doubt the grubbing mole denies
That Phoebus shines along the skies,
And judges prairies by the root
Of grass that snares his toilsome foot.
No doubt he holds in sand-blind scorn
The tales of creatures Eden-born;
Of dazzling seraphim who bare
Response to patriarchal prayer;
Of darkling wiles and whispers weird
That made our fervent sires afeard.
He teaches what he feels—no more;
And worms revere his groundling lore,
Believe creation's secret lies
Behind the fillets of his eyes,
And clamor, "Hail, Professor Mole,
Who proves the corpse, disproves the soul!"
Alas! we dwell in carnal times;
If spirits live, they live in rhymes.
Alone the poet keeps the faith,
Alone believes in imp and wraith,
Alone discerns Elysian coasts,
The angel ranks, the goblin hosts;
In all the earth no other gaze
Sees Eblis nights or Eden days.
I pause. The matter rolls too wide.
The farther shore is undescried.
I call in vain. The awful sea
Replies in tongues unknown to me.
Yea, tiny ripples nearest land

Speak words I cannot understand,
No voyager across that mere
Returns with news for mortal ear,
And therefore must I haste away
To dream the flimsy dreams I may.

VI

"Farewell!" the parting demons wept
As Downing shut the world without.
Then silence fell; the thunder slept;
The goblin tempest lulled its shout.
The captive ceased to moan and struggle,
And showed a gracious mind to snuggle.
A winsome, winning lass she seemed
As ever bard or painter dreamed,
With gipsy cheek of fervent bloom,
And fleeces black as raven's plume
That curled in glossy rings above
A brow Hellenic gods might love.
Such maidens danced in Syrian nights
Beneath Astarte's madding lights,
Or waved to Baal the wine and corn,
Or wept for Tammuz' drooping horn.
In Paphian grove, in Grecian tongue,
Such russet damsels leaped and sung,
Or glinted through the rippling foam
To welcome argent Venus home.
Most wondrous were the lassie's eyes;
They dreamed of myths and mysteries:
They sparkled coaxings, lures and loves;

They had as many tints as doves;
They twinkled galaxies of light,
And yet out-ravened blackest night.
They touched her captor's heart; he smiled
With sudden kindness on the child;
Then signed his only daughter near,
And said, "I bring a sister here."

VII

So Esther Downing gently kissed
The radiant child of midnight mist,
Arrayed her cleanly, gave her meat
And room upon the ingle seat,
Nor ceased the while to ask her name
And question her of whence she came.
But little would the stranger speak,
Though frolic dimpled chin and cheek.
One only tale had she to tell;
She laughed, "My name is Yesebel."
Meantime so beautiful was she,
So brimming bright with childish glee,
So seeming innocent in soul,
And ignorant of fear or dole,
As though sidereal night had blown
A cherub from beside the Throne,
And dropped it through New England air
To show that Paradise is fair.
And Downing, gazing on her grace,
Surmised a child of gentle race,
Beguiled or rapt by spooks unclean

To wear the crown of elfin-queen,
But infant pure as yet in mind
And fit to mate with human kind.
So, holding faith that Yankee roof
Would slur the airy fiends aloof,
He settled with his stubborn will
To father her, for good or ill.

VIII

Now flitted many a peaceful day,
Such days as worthy Shiloh knew
When Satan went his darkling way
And led afar his graceless crew.
No longer midnight rang agen
With goblin hoots and wizard cries;
No longer writhed the sons of men
On pins, like learning's butterflies.
No more, athwart the wailing rain,
Athwart the tempest's angry hum,
Did vague, unearthly voices plain
To Yesebel, and bid her come;
Aye, weep to her as mothers weep
To darlings vanishing beneath
A rushing billow's curling steep,
An arrowy river's foam and seethe.
The damsel grew by Downing's hearth
As fresh and pure as any flower
That findeth hospitable earth
And kindly sun and kissing shower.
She quickened all the hero's frame

To gladness when she smiled or spoke;
She made a spring of blossoms flame
From out that rugged heart of oak.

IX

Nor less did Esther twine and fold
The tendrils of her blooming May
About the waif of storm and wold,
And hold her dearer day by day.
Full sisterly the damsels kept
Each other close in loving palms,
Together laughed, together wept,
Together sang the sabbath psalms.
For Yesebel appeared as pure
As ever breeze that summer stirs;
No weird perfume, no naughty lure
Exhaled from any word of hers.
The knowledge of the wizard past
Had faded from her merry brain,
As one may see a dusky mast
Go down behind a shining main.
She knew no single wicked thing,
No cabalistic sign or spell,
Nor any stave that sorcerers sing
To greet the seignories of hell.
Forbidden carols, which before
Defiled her dainty coral mouth,
Had died like bubbles on the shore,
Had gone like swallows flitted south.
She knew not whence she came, nor how;

The elfin past was all a haze;
If any one recalled it now,
She mutely stared in prim amaze.
She held herself the very kin
Of those who daily kissed her face,
And found their sweetest joyaunce in
Communing with her sunny grace.

X

O change, mutation, miracle!
How many lives we live in one!
We hear a tinkling, tiny bell:
A curtain falls: a scene is done.
Another opens: all is new—
The actors, motives, joy and pain:
The past has disappeared like dew;
And yet we love and hate again.
O bright illusions! hopes like fires,
That quickened youth's aspiring feet!
Swift inclinations, strong desires,
Of old so steady in their seat!
Enchanted towers, a moment shown!
Tiaras round a spectre's head!
Where are you?—Shattered! overthrown!
The creatures that we were, are dead.

XI

So flitted thirty tranquil moons,
And every day this Yesebel
Increased her store of dainty boons

That dower a beauteous damozel.
Fair, too, was Esther, passing fair,
With faintly flusht carnelian skin,
And floods of sunlight through her hair,
And eyes revealing Heaven within.

And many loved them, many came
To bow before their dawn of charms:
High-stepping squires of county fame
For spacious homes and fruitful farms;
Some worshipping the holy skies
That Esther's lashes drooped above;
Some dazzled by those gipsy eyes
That seemed to promise storms of love.

And there was one, the favored one,
The largest, richest soul of all,
Whose lyric accents deftly spun
Round human hearts a wizard thrall;
Whose eloquence had tones sublime,
That startled while they lured the soul,
Like some resounding churchly chime
A-swing betwixt delight and dole;
Or, choosing thus, could swiftly wake
The stormy throbs of fervid blood,
And cause the waves of love to break
On all the shores of womanhood.

No squire was he of carnal mould,
With burly frame and beefy hand,
Attired in velvet, lace and gold
And boasting miles of fenced land.
The pastor of the fold he was,
Where Yesebel and Esther bowed

Beneath the glare of Sinai's laws,
Or saw the bow behind the cloud.
He looked a very Nazarite,
Assured to holiness from birth,
A spirit clothed in saintly white,
Almost a visitant on earth.
And many, gazing on his face
And groping for the soul within,
Believed him born a child of grace,
Who never knew the load of sin.
Such was Apollos Himmelstone,
A flower of starry gardens, sown
As though by angels, here below,
To show how Eden's roses blow.

XII

If any maid of mortal clay
Should love a bright seraphic sprite,
Should worship him for many a day,
And feel as nothing in his sight;
And then should hear him call her near
And meekly tell his angel love,
Beseeching her to hold him dear
And bide with him in realms above;
I think her happiness would be
Immense, intense as any dole;
And marvel like a billowing sea
Would almost drown her throbbing soul.

XIII

Such happiness to Esther fell.
She heard this gracious levite tell
His love, and plead to win her own;
She sate on love's imperial throne,
A queen of love; but ah, how meek!
What humble tears upon her cheek!
She spoke; the lips would scarcely part;
The words were sobs, but gave a heart.
So they were plighted, sweetly sworn
As one to joy, as one to mourn,
As one to tread the pilgrim's path
And fly the city doomed to wrath,
As one to seek the Joyous Heights
And Beulah's shades and Eden's lights.
Their voices mingled in the psalms,
They mingled in the sighs of prayer
They interchanged the precious balms
That angels fling through earthly air;
Wing interlocked with wing they flew
Above the birthplace of the dew
To where—. Ah, realm of mysteries,
Too high, too pure, for sinful eyes!
The mortal glance must turn away,
The worldly songster check his lay.

XIV

So other peaceful moons went by.
O gladsome moons, why should ye die?
Why should the perfect-circled light

Of joyaunce dwindle into night?
Alas! how many roses bloom
To shed their petals o'er a tomb!
There was a lily of the vale.
There was! Where is she? Ask the gale.
  There came a change in Esther's dream
Of life. It took a nightmare cast.
She rowed in vain against a stream.
A shadow threatened; spectres passed.
There came a phantom, vague but grim,
A fitful looking-for of wrong
Betwixt her loving heart and him
Who lately made her life a song.
  There came a change in Yesebel,
A transformation hard to tell,
A marvel wrought by ancient spell,
A bubble rising through a mere
But lately crystal pure and clear,—
A bubble from the founts of hell.
Aye, suddenly this saintly thing
Became as weird as any fay
That ever haunted moonlit spring
Before the elder faiths were grey.
In other maids it might have been
The pranksomeness of youthful mood,
The witchery of years of teen,
The dazing dawn of womanhood.
With Yesebel it seemed to be
A swift revulsion tow'rd the mind
And memories of days when she
Was one of Elfland's darkling kind.

Aroused—no matter how—who knows?
A dormant nature waked again,
A resurrected maenad rose,
A fettered syren burst her chain.

XV

Her eyes were like to haunted wells
Where guileful necromancy dwells,
And beckons those who gaze therein
To enter gorgeous halls of sin
That glow beneath the wizard wave
Like Eden courts, but hide a grave.
Her eyes were beautifully strange,
Alive with tender, melting change
Of many colors, many beams,
Commixed and sweet as fairy dreams,
But aye, whatever tint they caught,
Right perilous to tranquil thought,
And fit to drive an anchorite,
For safety, into desert night,
Or make a seraph close his eyes
And wing his way to sheltering skies.
No younker looked between their brims
Without a thrill in heart and limbs,
A something like delicious fear
That startled much, yet lured anear,
As though a little bird he were,
Bewildered by a serpent's stare.
Moreover, when she walked with men
In forest ways, or even when

She flouted them in rompish games
Beneath the gaze of puckered dames,
Her beauty breathed a weird perfume
(More luscious than of rose in bloom)
That made whoever stood anigh
Turn dreamy-gentle in the eye,
And deeply breathe to catch again
The sorcery that thrilled his brain,
Nor care if elders leaned askance
To study him with surly glance.

XVI

Alas, what puny fences rise
'Twixt Eden blooms and asps of hell!
The pastor's heart was Paradise,
Yet everywhere twined Yesebel.
While guarding seraphs wept or slept
Within and all about she slid,
Athwart the valley lilies crept,
Among the Sharon roses hid,
Or bent the fair forbidden fruit
To longing hands that trembled nigh,
And caroled sweet as Lydian lute,
"Behold ye shall not surely die."
How falls the saint, the shining one
Who walked in righteousness and faith,
Whose earnest feet had almost won
The heights beyond affright or skaith,
The gladsome mounts that Christian clomb
To see the road no longer dim,

And, fair ahead, the heavenly home
Ablaze with stars and seraphim?
Alas! full oft the noblest fall,
The sweetest heart, the richest brain;
The soul that loveth best of all,
By love is often snared and slain.

XVII

There came a time Apollos led
  Two lives, diverse as yea and nay:
  An open life, a life of day;
Another when the day was dead:
One wrenched by anguishes of prayer
  And wrestlings after penitence:
  Another bound in carnal sense
And haled by princes of the air.
Like one who hath two guardian sprites,
  (The one a fiend, an angel, one)
  He walked with Esther 'neath the sun,
With Yesebel through wizard nights.
The world that knew his morning mood
  Believed him fit for Eden meads;
  The world that shared his darkling deeds
Esteemed him one of Belial's brood.
How many live (ah, who can tell
  But One who watcheth from the skies?)
  How many live such life of lies,
Such double life of Heaven and Hell?

XVIII

Yea, only otherworldly eyen
Perceived the pastor's star grow pale.
How could unshriven saint divine
That holiness like his might fail?
Yet now and then, and yet agen
An airy shoal of whispers stole
From home to home of awestruck men
Concerning her who snared his soul.
Aye, babblings fathered none knew where,
(Such tales as mumbling beldames tell)
Like whirling snowflakes filled the air,
All drifting thick round Yesebel.
No wonder tattle chose her out:
Outlandish seemed her gipsy gaze;
Her story was a thing of doubt,
And elfin-strange were all her ways.
To wit, a-many times she larked
Such trills as deacons never pitched,
So syren-sweet that whoso harked
Stood open-mouthed like wight bewitched.
Full often chanted she like this
To girlish mate and rustic swain
Until they blushed with foolish bliss
And pleaded for the lilt again.
Whence came these magian minstrelsies
No learned doctor e'er divined;
Perchance they were but memories
Of nursing runes her grandam whined;
Perchance (as rigid spirits held)

A former life sent echoes down
Of psalms that dancing brownies yelled
To her who wore the wizard crown.
For oft of Lady Moon she hymned,
How bright she made the fairy knoll,
And how her loving maenads brimmed
With joy unknown to Quaker soul.

XIX

It cometh hard to mortal men
To write a rune from wizard lips,
For weirdly fingers jog the pen
And blunders gambol where it trips;
While, underneath the table-baize,
Demoniac jokers hammer through
A rigmarole of naughty lays
That worthy fairy never knew.
Yet noble Downing (mouth of gold)
Hath handed down the wonder-story
That oftentime his elfling trolled
This hymn to midnight's queen of glory.

Hear me, O mighty one,
Victor of Day,
Queen of the starry band,
Regent of Night!
Mount from the dying sun,
Fly from the Faraway,
Come to the Fairyland,
Come in thy might!

Give me to reign for thee!
Give me to reign,
Ruling the realm of fays
Far and anigh,
Making all bow the knee,
Kneel with bewildered brain,
Worship with longing gaze,
Worship and die!

XX

But gossips muttered stranger things.
They told that every moonlit night
She hasted forth (belike on wings)
And sought a lonesome windy height
Where anthemed hoarse an oaken wood;
And all the argent way she sang
In tongues no Christian understood
Till every bell of echo rang
And magic tumbled forth her brood.
Such roundelays she trilled, so sweet,
So full of necromantic power,
That brownies came on pranksome feet
And fairies leaped from every flower;
All trooping lightly tow'r'd a glade
Of turf amid the wizard wold,
Where roundabout they danced and played
As woodlings used in days of old.
Moreover, when the magic swarm
Dissolved and Yesebel returned,
Above her many a winged form

Of fay and gnome like fireflies burned;
Rejoicing sprites, with kindly eyes
As pure as jeweleries of dew,
And lips that had a pouting guise
Of blowing kisses while they flew.

XXI

Yea, further, all the voices woke
That peopled night in years agone.
From roaring wooded waste they spoke,
From tinkling brook and sighing lawn.
Around the eldritch girl's abode
They circled, lifting plaintive trills
And harmonies that cooed and flowed
Like yearning notes of whippoorwills:
Faint solos rolling into choirs
That sudden fell, then sharply rose,
Like carols from eolian wires
When winter through the casement blows:
Enchanters summoning their mate
(Perchance a mate, perchance their queen),
Till morning chased the goblin state
And power of darkness from the scene.
But ever, when the tempest yelled
And lightning tore the sheeted rain,
The magic music keened and swelled
Like choruses of souls in pain;
And through the windy midnight pressed
An eager train of pallid flights
That ringed the lassie's sleeping nest

And beat against her window-lights;
Now driving aimless here and there
As fitfully as shapes of dream,
Or bats and other waifs of air,
Bewildered by a lantern's gleam;
Now beckoning with filmy hands
And signing her to fare with them
Through lurid night to far-off lands,
Perchance to wear a diadem;
While ever and anon they purled
Imploring runes in speech unknown,
For ages flyted from the world,
Or known to wizard wight alone.
One word was clear in all the mell;
That single word was Yesebel.

XXII

Thus came the fairies oftentime,
As visible to mortal gaze
As phosphor-sheen of tropic clime,
Or waves of borealis rays.
And those who sentried from above
Affirmed that they were sweet to see
As any shape that painters love,
Or poets dream, or hermits flee;
While others, watching from below,
Half blinded by telluric air,
(Or viewing clearly; who can know?)
Spied nothing holy, nothing fair.
They said the radiances of night

Endured an evil second birth
And shed their garniture of light
Whenever they approached the earth;
That each renounced his pearly guise
For ugliness as black as soot
And looked the villain Sire of lies
From horned head to cloven foot.
And like enow our fallen star
Has potency to soil and mar
The sheen of whatsoever plume
Adventures through its sinful brume;
For well we know that long ago
Gods made the Syrian welkin glow,
Who lost anon their hallowed fame
To find Avernian name and shame.

XXIII

And Downing tells a ghastly tale,
Affirming in his Commentaries
That haunting sprites of nightly gale
Are swart of skin as whortleberries.
"As black," he adds, "as any kittle
That ever shamed a slattern's ingle;
An' every Shiloh chug kin whittle
Superior fairies from a shingle.
"I watched 'em through my kitchen winders,
A-whirlin' down the blowy weather,
Now scalin' round like paper cinders,
Now flockin clost as bees together.
The wings were flimsy, torn an' scurvy,

Consid'able like paper money;
An' when they tumbled topsy-turvy,
'Twas partly horrid, partly funny;
While as for music, any boodle
Of summer frogs in Shiloh ditches,
Will yowp a sweeter Yankee-Doodle
Than all your singin'-schools of witches.
"The boys who squinted from the garret
Reported quite another story,
Pretendin' they could skurcely bear it,
The figgers glinted sech a glory.
But youth is fearfully deludin';
It's eyes are big as bushel measures;
An' whipsters allays are concludin'
Forbidden spitzenbergs are treasures;
While we, who mowed our craps to stubble
In fields as wide as theirn, an' wider,
Know thoroughly through toil an' trouble
That Sodom fruit makes awful cider.

XXIV

"Jest here I suddintly remember
That certain neighbors grumbled roundly
Because I didn't scoot up chember
An' switch my gipsy lassie soundly;
Believin' (very like with reason)
That she was queen of certain devils
Who sartinly would hold it treason
To bring her trouble by their revels;
An' holdin forth (perhaps correckly)

That sech an arnest kind of dealin'
U'd scart the 'tarnal coots direckly
An' hazed 'em out'n Shiloh squealin'.
"An here I'm druv to make confession,
Although it hurts like pullin' grinders;
But times there be of dark possession,
An' wiser men have worn the blinders.
The jade was sech a tearin' beauty,
An' looked so leetle like a sinner,
I couldn't squarely face my duty
An' say that Uncle Hob was in her.
I hate to larrup gals like cattle;
My heart preferred to resk a sally;
An' thus I soon declared for battle,
Though waged with all the Shadder Valley.
"So, after takin' drink an' vittle,
I trotted out to poke an' whittle.
An' now that flyin' generation
Of vipers throwed a transformation.
They quit cahootin' round my gables
An' settled down like forty Babels,
A truly awful, howlin', squirmin',
Rambunkshus flock of pizen vermin,
Goats, tomcats, panters, anacunders,
Imps, dragons, spooks an' other wonders,
Who charged me on a tearin' gallop,
An' seemed resolved to have my scallop.
"The leader was a boar-constrictor,
Who opened six-feet-wide his picter,
Proposin', if I'm not mistaken,
To try the whole of Downing's bacon,

But never got a single swaller,
Because I sabred through his collar
An' left his serpentship in sections
That skipped in opposite directions.
"The next who offered me a banter
Was twenty foot or so of panter,
Who carmly ast himself to supper,
But got a slash from snoot to crupper,
That ruther cut the combat shorter,
Both halves a-bawlin' out for quarter.

XXV

"Well, after that the fight was easy;
The spooks were old, the dragons wheezy;
The billy-goats were clumsy hitters
An' kinder tottlish on their bobbins;
The tomcats frowzy, starvelin' critters,
A poorish match for mice an' robins;
From whence I jedge that Satan's legions
Are nourished purty much on shadders;
An' probably the brimstone regions
Don't run so rich as Shiloh medders.
"At any rate, the spirit bodies
Went down as easily as toddies.
I found it ruther fun than trouble
To bust their glory like a bubble,
An' worked destruction on their models
Till every rood was heaped with noddles,
All dribblin smoke from mouths an' noses
Like jackolanterns lit with oakum,

Some smilin' peaceable as Moses,
Some snappin' when I went to poke 'em,
As though, perhaps, some perished hardened
An' others longin' to be pardoned.
"In twenty minutes Tophet's embers
Conceded that the fight was over;
The biggest part had lost their members,
The rest had skittered off to cover.

XXVI

"But now comes Beelzebub's endeavor
To make the battle look like dreamin';
The coot is more than Injun-clever
In every kind of trick an' schemin'.
"When mornin' sot the little birdies
A-grindin' on their hurdy-gurdies
I puttered out with pick an' shovel
To lay the witches under gravel.
But everything was changed; the corpses
Were neither fish nor flesh nor porpses.
I couldn't light on wing or gizzard
Of fiend or spook or ghoul or wizard.
Instead of hell-fire salamanders
I found a stack of geese an' ganders;
An' wust of all, my neighbor Moultrie
Presented claims for slaughtered poultry.
Thus Beelzebub, that prince of cheatin',
Contrived to cover up his beatin',
To plunder me of all my laurels
An' cast a slur upon my morals."

XXVII

Thus was it noble Downing fought,
And saw his triumph turn to naught,
While Shiloh rang with foolish scorn
And Satan lifted high his horn.

Meantime the elfin maiden strolled
By midnight through the oaken wold,
And there beneath the moonshine did
Whatever Samuel's laws forbid.
Nor walked alone; beside her stole
The gracious youth who knew the right,
And pointed out the Heavenly goal
To lowly Shiloh's sons of light.
Nor he alone: the mysteries
Of wizard darkness lurked anigh;
For zephyrs murmured witching glees
And thickets whispered counsels sly;
The field-mice squeaked forbidden words,
The crickets chirruped wicked leers,
And titters came from tattling birds
And sneering owlets hooted jeers.

So, many a time, through Eblis land
This couple sauntered hand in hand,
And heard its naughty echoes ring
As gladsome music, sweeter far
To them than any caroling
Of saints beyond the morning star;
Nor cared though many a cloven foot
Behind them tracked their paradise;
Nor cared though poison dewed its fruit
And all its roses budded lies.

XXVIII

One summer eve Apollos sought
The bedside of a dying boy;
Unearthly comfortings he brought,
And changed the trembling plaint to joy.
His prayer arose on lyric wings
That seemed to challenge angel flights;
His psalm resounded like the strings
Of golden harps on Eden's heights;
And ere he left the mourning hearth
To follow paths that seraphs flee,
A grateful soul had 'scaped from earth
And pain and sin and such as he.

XXIX

He burst away from prayer and praise
To find delights of fairy glade.
His cheek was all a-flame; his gaze
Shot flashes like a polished blade.
He flew with eager feet along
The road from which he warned so well,
And every word he breathed was song,
For every word was Yesebel.
But suddenly a woman's eyes
Illumed the darkness; sparkled keen
Yet mournfully; seraphic skies
Of love and love's reproof; their sheen
Was terrible to him, though sweet.
They pierced the shadows round his soul;
They checked the madness of his feet.

He paled like one who hears the toll
Of funeral bells, and fears to die.
He stopped with lifted arms and sobbed,
"Oh, Esther!"—"Yes," she wept, "'Tis I!"
Then, standing by his side, she throbbed
And struggled through a stormy mere
Of pleading, every wave a tear.

XXX

I know you love another. Yea,
I know her name. But let it go!
My gladness had its little day
And set forever. Be it so!
I was not worthy such a throne
Of joy as once seemed all my own.

O days when earth was paradise!
When seraphim attended me!
Alas! I half forgot the skies,
Forgot my very God in thee.
He rescued with the sword of flame.
He punished. Hallowed be his name!

I murmur not. I blame you not.
I ask you not for happiness.
I offer not a love forgot.
Its strength is gone. I could not bless
Your life as once I hoped to do.
Henceforth a gulf divides us two.

But you, Apollos! where are you?
Am I the only one forsook?
Look back upon the joy you knew
In ways of holiness. Then look
Adown the path you tread to night.
Are they the same? Is darkness light?

Where is the eloquence that burned
Along the road that leads to God?
Has he who taught the journey, learned
No footstep feebler souls have trod?
The guide, the champion, of our band
Alone turns back from Eden-land.

Are not the companies of Heaven,
The high communion of the just,
The purity like snow new-driven,
The wealth beyond all loss or rust,
Fairer than any hope to dwell
With lords and princesses of hell?

XXXI

She ceased. Her pleading mantled up
To sobbing,—woe's primeval speech.
It overbrimmed the little cup.
Of human language; strove to reach
Unearthly eloquence. Meanwhile
Her lips revealed a yearning smile
That writhed and quivered like a wretch
Whose limbs the torture-engines stretch.

But presently she grew aware
That none attended to her moan.
She sobbed and gasped to empty air;
The man she pleaded with had flown;
Had leaped away like one who speeds
From punishment of evil deeds.
He ran like Cain, alone, alone.
The wicked darkness helped his flight,
The swarthy-pinioned, demon night.
It shielded him from pitying eyes
That strove to follow, longed to save.
Alone he fled with broken cries
Like one who fights against a wave
That smothers him in curling froth.
His aching heart was bitter wroth
With every living thing but her
Whose magic made his pulses stir.

He neared the wizard wold and heard
Her voice careering like a bird;
(A bird afloat on balanced wings
Who sings unknowing that he sings)
So lightly soared her gladsome lay
Of times when frolic gods held sway;
When every hill-top had its grove,
And every grove its glowing shrine,
Where Baal accepted corn and wine,
Or Ashtaroth accepted love.

XXXII

There was a maid of Sidon
  Who joyed to watch the night
When all its princes ride on
  Their jeweled steeds of light.

She loved the brightest daemon
  Who flies from pole to pole,
And wrote his lordly name on
  The altar of her soul.

To find him and to hold him
  She wandered north and south;
To clasp him and to fold him
  Against her heart and mouth.

But far above he sparkled
  And reigned from zone to zone;
And far below she darkled,
  Still loving him alone.

Oh, weary was the maiden
  When halted she to rest:
It was the daemon's Aidenn,
  And lovers there are blest.

For, weeping near a river,
  She looked therein and spied
Her darling's glory quiver
  Beneath the crystal tide.

Then down the maiden fluttered,
And never more was seen:
But daemon voices muttered:
"Below she reigns a queen."

XXXIII

He found her dancing through a glade
Of moonlit turf and leafy shade,
While all around and all above
Disported airy, fairy forms
As thick as motes when summer warms
The marshy wold to life and love.
Around the dancing elfin girl
They flitted blythely to and fro
On hazy wings of lucent pearl,
Now darting swift, now wheeling slow,
As fitful breezes chanced to blow,
Or crazy eddies chanced to whirl.
Aloft, the crescent goddess flew
On slender wings of argent sheen
As though the joyous Fairy Queen
Arrived athwart the hollow blue
To find and greet her devotee.
Nor came alone, for every zone
Of sparkling night with daemons shone,
The gods who ruled the Tyrian sea
And made their names and glory known
To gay Hellene and grave Chaldee:
While ever, through the northern sphere,
The boreal spirits toiled to rear

A paradise of throbbing flame,
Incessant tumbling, yet the same,
So deftly wrought some magian name.

XXXIV

He found her dancing like a breeze,
In raiment delicate as mist
And shorter than her dimpled knees,
While lovingly the moonlight kissed
Her arms from shoulder down to wrist.
He found her dancing like the seas,
The bacchant seas, when tempests pour
Their mighty music far from shore;
When every frantic triton blows
His shell for laughing sprite and gnome,
And every billow naiad throws
Abroad her draperies of foam.
He called her fiercely, "Yesebel!"
For still he greatly feared to see
The lurid entrances of Hell.
She answered, singing, "Come to me!"
He looked; he saw the pearly teeth,
The coral curl of chanting lips,
The ebon hair in tossing wreath,
The levin glance, the bosom's swell,
The rosy hands athwart the hips,
The twinkling feet, the maenad glee;
And all his puny anger fell,
A falling star, to quick eclipse.
No power had he to bid her nay,

No power to turn and speed away,
But dazzled stared with panting breath,
The feeblest man of feeble clay
That ever reeled in ways of death.

XXXV

She laughed; she kissed his golden head,
The while he trembled like a leaf.
"There's not a sin on earth," she said,
"Except the dreary sin of grief:
There's not a holier thing than mirth
In all the holy lands of earth.

"The laughing gods of olden time,
The deities of gladsome men,
Illume us, beckon us to climb
Afar from dogma's smoky den,
Where bigots pile the cruel fires
With nature's pleasures, hopes, desires.

Look upward! Night is all divine
For those who tremble not to die.
Look upward! Jocund daemons shine;
Olympian revels crowd the sky.
Look up and see what life should be:
A godlike dance for me and thee!

And, ah my queen! my queen of fays!
She lifts her shining arms above
The cloudy crests, the flying haze

Of heavenly night, and bids to love,
The old, the sweet, the strong command,
So well obeyed in Elfin land.

Dear goddess queen! beneath thy glance
What gentle pleas and soft replies,
What yearning lyres and tender chants,
What clinging lips and burning eyes,
How many millions have there been
Since thou hast reigned, O goddess-queen!

XXXVI

She stopped; then swiftly caught his hands
And folded him in coiling bands,
An Eden-serpent, deadly sweet
From winsome head to lissome feet.
Her snaky glances brightly stole
Through his, and paralyzed his soul.
She needed not to murmur word
Of sortilege or charm; he heard
Her witching heartbeats throb and seethe
In all his frame; he felt her breathe
Her sorceries through every vein;
He felt her magic in his brain;
He only gasped to suck perfume;
He drank her fragrant, dazing bloom;
The draught was death; he drank his doom.
She saw him fall; she saw him lost;
She uttered not a word of boast.
She saw her glamour win its prize,

And could not speak, except in sighs.
But triumph sent the pagan blood
Athwart her face in burning flood,
And lit her eyes to flamings, while
She kissed him with a syren smile,
Victorious, a queen of guile!
A soul was lost, a victim fell
For aye beneath her evil spell,
Forever fell to worship sin
And whomsoever rules therein.

XXXVII

Who never gazed with sparkling eye
On gleam and shape of fairy mead;
Who never saw the elfin sky
One moment glow like Heaven indeed;
Who never heard the lorelei sing
Till all his blood like lava ran;
I count him but a lumpish thing,
Not worth the lordly title, Man.
The weak behold the mighty fall,
And, marvel how their feet should slip;
The sheltered pinnace tells the yawl
How ocean whelmed the lofty ship;
The cripple keeps his blood and breath
When battle lays the champion pale;
The ant surveys the lion's death,
And says, "Behold me strong and hale!"
The daisies smile superior
When giant oaks bestrow the plain:

They only felt a zephyr stir;
Aloft it was a hurricane.
  There never yet was groundling mole
That perished climbing peaks of snow;
There never yet was pigmy soul
That bore Promethean sin and woe.
No levin rends the fluttering leaf,
No wreck befalls the grubbing hind,
No syren music lures the deaf,
No demon star misleads the blind;
While he, the chief, the kingly one,
Whose noble blood is throbbing fire,
Whose haughty pinions seek the sun,
Whose aim is ever high and higher;
How often doth his swiftness drive
Through dazing gleams or blinding glooms!
How often must the lightning rive
His daring might of splendid plumes!
  He finds a more than human grace
Where flesh discovers flesh alone;
He sees beyond the outer face,
He sees the soul upon its throne;
He clothes another with himself,
And therefore finds her passing fair.
He sees the god within the elf;
He sees the fiends as once they were.
He bends the knee where others stand,
Because he has the second sight;
He seems the fool of all the land,
Because he loves with all his might.

XXXVIII

The story goes (who now receives
What ancient men affirmed on oath?)
That underneath the oaken leaves,
And sheltered by a laurel's blowth,
Two lated urchins, cold with fright,
Beheld the Stygian revellings,
The wood a hell of lurid light,
The air a hell of goblin wings;
Beheld their pastor madly whirl
With Yesebel in Belial's dance,
While all around a wizard swirl
Revolved with stormy song and prance;
Till lastly came a fearful shape,
Beyond the ghastliest thought of man,
A formless form as black as crape,
With pinions reaching many a span;
Whereon these younkers, all agape,
Displayed what spryness younkers can,
And trundled off their trembling meat
To pious Shiloh's drowsy street.

The village won, they yelled amain
Till nightcaps blanched each window pane,
Till lovely woman poured her shriek
And infants made the echoes speak,
While strident goodman, plangent squire
Responded, "Murder! witches! fire!"
At last, when every soul was hoarse,
At last the case was understood,
And Shiloh mustered all its force

To march against the wicked wood,
Resolved to dye its steel in gore
Of wizard throngs, and furthermore
To capture Tophet's sooty peers
And bind them for a thousand years.

XXXIX

Now Downing, in his Thirteenth Book,
Relates in noble terms the matter.
"I kinder hoped," he says, "to cook
The goose of Satan to a tatter.
We had a hundred men, about,
With twenty wagon-loads of ladies,
Besides a whappin' younker rout
An' hounds enough to pin all Hades.
I sent the bacheldors ahead,
With orders strict to keep a-wabblin',
Expectin' soon to hear their lead
A-whizzin' through a yowpin' goblin.
"But common men, as ginrals know
Are ruther peaceful kind of cattle,
An' allays travel pesky slow
Whenever they go forth to battle.
Afore we'd journeyed very fur
Or Nipton's flames begun to blind us,
I found that every skirmisher
Was forty rod or more behind us.
Thereon I formed my army front
Accordin' to the law of natur:
The women first, to ketch the brunt;

The chaps who'd want to save 'em, later.
The better-halves an' gals, you ken,
Might use the shays for battle-chariots;
An that would stir the married men,
An' cheer the bacheldor Iscariots.
"The line was purty chirk at last,
Especially the dogs an' hosses,
An' rattled forrard middlin' fast,
Considerin' the stumps an' mosses,
Till finally we nighed the grove
Where Satan's deacons cut their capers,
All lookin' monstrous hot above,
As though the twigs were burnin' tapers.
I ranked my wagons thill to thill,
An' give the word to whip tremendous;
Then, whack, we cantered up the hill
As fast as hoofs an' wheels could send us.

XL

"We reached the top. You never saw
A spot like that for signs an' wonders:
The turf ablaze like kindled straw,
The oaks a-spittin' sparks an' thunders,
The lanskip glarin' all around,
The air alive with spooks an' devils,
While crowds of witches sot the ground
A-teeter with their stompin' revels;
All guarded by a dragon's rolls
Of slimy scales an' tail enormous,
Who snorted ovens-full of coals,
An' blew 'em ragin' hot to warm us.

"But, most astonishin' to tell,
I spied our lately wusshupt parson,
Both arms around our Yesebel,
A-jiggin' through the fire an' arson;
Both steppin' out at sech a pace,
So dandified an' swift an' supple,
With sech a gladness in the face,
I couldn't help admire the couple.
They kinder seemed like king an' queen:
I never saw a gal no sweeter:
Her cheeks a-flush, her glances keen:
All Shiloh couldn't show her beater.
She flew like any busy bee;
There warn't another jade went past her;
Yit seemed to me the parson he
Could foot it off a leetle faster.
He had a sort of unkshus slide:
You saw him, then you couldn't find him;
He squelched the spryest wizard's pride,
An' left the peartest imps behind him.

XLI

"But while I stood with jaws apart,
A-gogglin' at those hansome critters,
My army got a trifle scart
An' suddintly went all to fritters;
For when the hosses smelt the dragon,
An' when the ladies fairly saw it,
Away went every tarnal wagon
As fast as dobbin's legs could draw it;

An' clost behind, with howl an' whine,
Dogs, younkers, single men an' married,
The fastest, loudest drove of swine
That ever Tophet's legion harried.

"The only one who stuck it through
Was Esther Anne, my faithful daughter.
God bless her! Downing grit is true,
An' Downing blood is thicker 'n water.
She wouldn't dodge the pesky ventur,
Though right ahead stood Hell embattled,
An', jerry-go-lang! for Shiloh centre
Those wagons of salvation rattled.
She went beside me through the scrimmage
Without the smell of fire upon her,
For Satan's impotent to damage
A maiden clad in grace an' honor.

"Well, right away the fight begun,
The devils spoutin' smoke an' flashes,
I bangin' with my duckin' gun,
An' blowin' some to dust an' ashes.
The forest glimmered red an' black
With fizzin' fire an' sooty cinders;
The noise was loud enough to crack
In flinders forty thousen' winders.
In short, t'was jest the roughest tussle,
The toughest muss for roars an' blazes,
That ever taxed old Downing's muscle
An' scart him into prayers an' praises.

XLII

"Considerin' their cause was bad,
The goblins nobly used their chances,
An' where the dragon led they had
A sneakin' hope to make advances.
That dragon give me special fits:
He scorched an' baked an' fried an' roasted;
He smelted both my eppylets
An' left my uniform well toasted.
I couldn't dodge the creetur's aim,
Though peart at dodgin' as an otter;
An' every time he blazed, the flame
Appeared to me a trifle hotter.
At last, as flints were gittin' few
An' nawthin' seemed to come of shootin',
I thought I'd try an interview
Upon a more familiar footin'.

"The sword of Gideon I drawed,
An' went for Granther Dragon's jacket.
The monster smoked an' blazed an' clawed,
But found he couldn't stand the racket.
His scales an' buttons flew around;
His trotters wabbled sorter limber;
He winced an' whimpered like a hound;
His afterparts were all a-kimber.
Then suddintly an awful glare
Ascended swishin' through the branches;
The cuss had scooted for his lair
With all his devils at his haunches.
You never saw a garden toad

So lively in a shingle-whackin';
I jest remarked that somethin' glowed,
An' then his majesty was lackin'.

XLIII

"But I had nary time to laugh
While any warlock stayed, or wizard;
I thrashed my harvest into chaff,
An' spelt my stent from A to Izzard.
I strowed the country right an' left
With Tophet's elders an' exhorters,
With damaged prophets, powwows cleft,
An' necromancers carved in quarters.
The very whiteoaks couldn't hold
Agin the slash of Downing's whinyard;
I ravaged all that haunted wold
As Ahab ravaged Naboth's vineyard.
I didn't leave a trunk unchopped;
The rubbidge covered several acres,
An' everywhere the wizards dropped
In urgent need of undertakers.
The hill is higher far than 'twas
Before I laid the woodland level,
An' schollards dig there teeth an' claws
As old an' ugly as the devil.

"But still, alas! I couldn't do
A Shiloh soldier's perfect duty;
I failed to run Apollos through,
An' save my little gipsy beauty,
They whipped about at lightnin' pace,

Onsartin, like a firefly's glitter,
The parson smirkin' in my face,
The lassie blushin', all a-titter.
They sparkled there, they fluttered here,
They glimpsed along from nook to cover.
Betimes they capered purty near,
An' roundabout my head would hover.
But finally there came a glare
Of fiery claws and flamy pinions,
That hustled them, I s'pose, to where
Apollyon snarls among his minions."

XLIV

Thus Downing saw them, sturdy child
Of common sense, who found no grace
In dazzling sin, or soul beguiled,
In demon plume, or fairy face;
Who saw the earthly husk of things,
And saw the earthly husk alone,
Nor guessed a grub has hidden wings,
Nor guessed the gem within the stone;
Who held the ancient virtues sin,
The hoary creeds bedeviled tales,
Nor found a gleam of glory in
The names that ruled Elysian vales;
To whom the pearly sylphs were black,
The syren's lilt a doleful scream,
The fairies but a vampire pack,
And poesy a wicked dream.

Thus Downing saw this fated pair
Who sought to princes of the wind;
Who found each other deadly fair,
And therefore loved, and therefore sinned.
He saw them smitten; hurried swift
As lightning through a fiery rift
Of Eblis; souls of driven flame
That agonized from sin to shame;
Apostate angels, tempest-tost;
Extinguished stars, forever lost.

XLV

But Esther saw with other eyes,
For sorrow knows the second-sight;
And loving souls, though clad in white,
Behold with love's alert surmise.
She saw them soaring hand in hand,
Their glances mingled, eye to eye,
Their breath commingled, sigh to sigh,
Like creatures born of Paphian land,
Who held each other far too dear
To question whether Eden's strand
They neared, or Hell's cimmerian mere.
She saw them floating, far above,
On beaming clouds of delicate lawn,
Around them many a kissing dove
And dovelike spirit, winged with love,
Who guided them to meet the dawn
As tenderly as angels guide
Forgiven souls through Heaventide.

Adown the kindling East they shone;
And there, a welkin's width away,
They lingered glorious; seemed to stay
One breath upon a dazzling throne;
One moment reigned; then sudden fell
For aye; while Esther wept, "Farewell!"

THE
LAST OF THE WAMPANOAGS

II

THE LAST OF THE WAMPANOAGS

I

It was a time of bloody strife
Between the Baldybird and Lion,
And woful plagues were sorely rife
In every nook of Freedom's Zion:
A plague of Britishers and Hessians,
A plague of tarred and feathered traitors,
Of powwow dances, witch possessions
And Mingos fierce as alligators.
It was the nation-building time
That freed Americans of fetters,
And garred them grace in prose or rhyme
To say they never met their betters;
When, startling Shiloh's single street,
Appeared a pale and eager rider,
His courser reeling through the heat,
His raiment dusty as a spider
Who halted near a visage fair
That blushed behind a window lattice,
And faltered, "Lady, tell me where
Abides New England's Cincinnatus."

II

She pointed out a modest cot,
Bedight with shingled porch and gable,
And, close behind, a garden lot

And roomy barn and airy stable.
A well and woodpile graced a yard
Where hum of beehives, honey-laden,
And bustling whirs of spinning jarred
Through drowsy hymns of a rosy maiden.
Beyond declined a dimpled run
Of ploughing land and wood and meadow,
Where gladsome corn revered the sun
And thankful kine reposed in shadow:
A Shiloh farm of knobs and wales
Without a lonely level acre,
But choicely rimmed with chestnut rails
And kept as clean as any Quaker.
There dwelt our solar prototype
When duty did not send him shining
To give the Lion's tail a gripe
And set the Unicorn a-whining.
Beside his grindstone Downing stood,
In shirtsleeves moiling, as he wonted,
To keen anew his sabre's mood,
But lately sorely gapped and blunted
In slicing various Tory knaves
Who came by night to burn and pillage,
And drive our fathers off for slaves,
And make an end of Shiloh village.

III

The rider halted, hat in hand.
"My name," he said, "is Captain Speeder,
And I arrive with haught command

From Putnam, our illustrious leader.
He bade me find you, bade me say
That things are faring worse than sadly
With those who hold the righteous way,
While Satan's kingdom prospers madly.
"Briton nor Hessian hurts us now,
Nor lurking brave, nor sneaking Tory;
For we can front them brow to brow
And hurl aback their fiercest foray.
It is a girl, a buxom jade,
An Indian witch, a powwow's daughter,
Who makes Columbia's soul afraid
And lures her mighty ones to slaughter.
She glides about our camp by night,
Adroit in magic, strong in beauty,
And slays the sentinel outright,
Or wiles him from the beat of duty.
Yea, none resist her cunning lure;
The veteran renowned in battle,
The officer we counted sure,
All follow her like silly cattle;
And those who perish not reveal
Our plans to whatsoever human;
In sort that Freedom seems to reel
Before the malice of a woman.
"You know of Ethan Allen; know
His faithfulness beyond suspicion;
And know how many a stalwart foe
His arm has pitched to hot perdition.
He too is gone; he went at dawn
With many oaths to slay the maiden;

And that is all we know; he's gone,
Though scarcely gone, we think to Eden."

IV

So far the captain spake. But here
The hero thundered forth his sorrow.
"Go tell the ginral, never fear;
I'll follow Ethan's trail to-morrow.
What! Allen gone, the peartest soul
That bore aloft our Yankee banners!
How oft I've heerd his curses roll
In battle's front, like glad hosanners!
How often laughed to see him roar
An' caper 'round a giant Briton,
Then smite him hip an' thigh before
I guessed the side he meanter hit on!
I'll follow him, and save him, too.
If he abides in airthly regions;
If not, I'll make it awful blue
In hell for Satan's murky legions.
"But first I ought to find the maid
Who keeps our Baldybird in trouble.
An' let her know that Gideon's blade
Can mow Apollyon's crap to stubble.
I've offen heerd of her afore,
Unless my memory's in error;
Her granther was a sagamore,
King Metacom, New England's terror.
I think (if she is young an' fair)
That Downing wouldn't like to hurt her,

But ruther feel disposed to spare,
An' do his peartest to convert her.
At all events, I'll scurry west
At once, to bag her, or to try it.
But now dismount an' take a rest,
An' try a Yankee farmer's diet."
The captain bowed. "I may not stay;
My duty is to bear your message."
He bowed again, and rode away,
As swift as prairie horse-expressage.

V

"Then Downing" (here we quote his book)
"Sot down an' made a hearty dinner;
For Esther was a faithful cook,
An' had her mother's cunning in her.
Besides, I allays find that I
Can fight my best on stacks of rations;
An' that's the strategy whereby
The British lick their neighbor nations.
Besides, I crammed my havresack
With pork an' beans an' codfish salted,
In order that I mightn't lack
A Yankee supper when I halted.
"Of course I wore my uniform,
With eppylets an' hat an' feather,
Because the cloth is extry warm
An' proof agin the wettest weather.
My trooper pistils, one inch bore,
Hefty enough to knock down cattle,
An' sabre, three foot long or more,

Made out my armyment for battle.
So fixed, upon my mare I got,
An' flung a good-bye kiss to Esther;
She prayed a leetle on the spot,
An' I, though not religious, blest her.

VI

"Then off I started, sou-by-west,
Through swarmin' borough, town an' village;
For old Connecticut is blest
With livelier craps than those of tillage.
An' everywhere I went or come
The people gathered by the thousen;
I tell ye they were nowise dumb
When Downing cantered past their housen.
In ginral, though, I'm pleased to say,
The grown-up men were off to slarter,
An' those who whooped me on my way
Were wife an' granny, lad an' darter.
"A week I traveled, all afire;
Then duly halted over Sunday,
Attended meetin', sung in choir,
An' started out refreshed o' Monday,
At last I sighted, on a hill,
The Yankee banners all a-quiver;
An' found a sentry, squattin' still
An' watchin' 'crost a shady river,
I sent him with the mare to camp,
An' took his beat, an' done his duty;

For day was puttin' out his lamp,
An' soon I might expect the beauty."

VII

No zephyr stirred the mellow calm,
No footfall strolled amid the night;
The air was drenched with humid balm
Of forest blooms; a droning flight
Of insects fretted on the ear,
As though the ancient Baal of gnats
And flies were holding revel near.
Aloft, a fitful rush of bats
Careered on lean and sticky wings,
While fireflies hasted through the grass
Like travelers lost and mad with fear.
The air was full of songs and stings
And rustlings; serpents seemed to pass
From tuft to tuft of underwood:
One might believe the wizard brood
Had taken shapes of beastly things
And swarmed to meet in hellish mass.
Below, the river ran like ink,
A stagnant, silent, stygian stream,
Funereal-palled from brink to brink
By giant trees. A single gleam
Of spectral moonlight wandered through,
And showed against the oozy brae
A silver-gleaming birch canoe,
A boat for scouts to cross the wave
And gather food, or seek affray
With Tory thief or Mingo brave.

VIII

Our hero, careful lest a ball
Might find him from the other shore,
Descended creeping, reached the yawl
And laid his length upon its floor.
Recumbent there, with visage darkened,
His heavy pistols cocked for strife,
His breath suppressed, he slyly harkened
And peeped for signs of hostile life.

Betimes a drowsy drone he heard
Of plunging waters, far below;
Or was it but a thrumming bird
In dozing terror? Who can know?
For hours he listened thus; and then
Perhaps he slept; he never told.
There come awearied moments when
The sentry nods, though good as gold.

At last he roused himself—perchance
From revery—perchance from dream;
He raised his head and threw a glance
About him; then across the stream.
Diana, hunting high in night,
Sent arrows through the forest ranks
That feathered half the flood with light
And filigreed the curving banks;
And there, amid the elfin sheen,
He spied an Indian maiden kneel,*
Who plied a paddle, dimly seen,

* The birch-bark canoe is paddled kneeling.

And urged along a spectral keel.
He rubbed his eyes and looked again;
He thought to see her fade away;
But soon a glorious argent vein
Of moonlight showed her clear as day.

IX

Then Downing knew that death was near;
He knew the witch, her errand knew;
Yet quickly made his shallop veer
To meet her wizard-built canoe.
Ah! perilous she was to greet
As ocean maid, or forest fay,
Or lorelei singing deadly-sweet,
Or Circe smiling sense away.
Her cheek was brown, but fervid bloom
Of roses flushed its dimpled grace;
Her hair was black as raven's plume,
And veiled with magic half her face.
Her form was slender, round and tall,
And shapely were the arms that twined
From side to side, and drove her yawl
To meet the foeman of her kind.
She smiled upon him. Oh, that smile!
What viper hath such deadly guile!
It seemed the joyous friendliness
Of childhood, innocent of ill;
It had a lovelorn tenderness,
And yet its longing was to kill.

X

They met and passed; in vain he sought
To clutch her while she skimmed anear;
She whirled her paddle quick as thought,
And sent her feathery pinnace clear,
Then turned the prow adown the flow
And paddled gently, flinging back
Such smiles as love alone should throw,
To lure him down her fatal track.

He followed where her witchery led,
He went like one with frenzied head,
He seemed a man as good as dead:
His only longing was to seize,
To clutch and carry her away,
No matter where, no matter why;
And so he bent him on his knees,
And made his paddle madly play,
And flew like one who longs to die.

Now came a throbbing, reeling strife
For mastery in speed; the blades
Incessant leaped to swifter life;
And through the river's lights and shades,
Forever quickening, hissed the skiffs.
The rippling pools and bays retired;—
The lofty landmarks—hills and cliffs;
And still the panting rowers fired
Their madding hearts to fiercer race;
While aye the maiden backward cast
The elfin glamor of her face,
And seemed to beckon, "Follow fast!"

XI

For miles the nimble paddles flew,
Implacable and strong and true
As eagle wings athwart the blue;
For miles they traversed gloom and sheen
With scarce a fathom-length between
The Yankee chief and forest-queen.

Yet aye a distant, surly drone,
(The growl of some torrential leap
Adown a cyclopean steep)
Approached and rolled in grimmer tone.
At last it poured a lion roar;
It seemed to clamor, "Turn or die!"
But still the maiden plied her oar,
And still the chaser followed nigh.
He felt the current's quick'ning swirl,
He knew how near he was to drown;
But yet he hoped to clutch the girl
Before destruction sucked him down.

Eftsoon he spied, not far away
Beneath the gleam of Ashtaroth,
A lofty, glorious ghost of spray,
Spanning the river's tossing froth;
And underneath its mighty plumes—
Distinct against the further glooms—
A burnished edge of fleeting steel,
The cataract's awful downward wheel.

XII

He paused a breath. The lorelei flung
A gesture back. Again he wrought,
And tow'rd the watery Eblis sprung
Without another doubting thought.
Then came the rush. He glanced before.
The maiden stood with folded arms,
Upright amid the seethe and roar,
And turned upon him all her charms.
Her eyes like costly jewels shone,
And dazed his vision even then;
Her face was Circe's very own,
A face to dazzle dying men.
But weirdly was it changed in style;
It looked the visage of a Fate.
She smiled, but now it was a smile
Of cruel triumph, burning hate.
He saw her thus, but all too late,
For then he saw her swiftly sink,
And he alone was on the brink.
He followed down the mad descent
With but a single hasty prayer—
A gasp for mercy; down he went
A hundred feet through mist and air;
And downward still; the boiling billow
Received him, clutched him, hurled him swift
Along the rapid's bubbly drift,
As helpless as a wisp of willow.

XIII

He drove, he never knew how long,
The sport of water-sprites and gholes.
Gay bells he heard, delicious song,
And tinkling zithers all aquiver,
The sounds that ravish drowning souls,
The lorelei strains of Charon's river.
He thought of death and hell and heaven;
Betimes he thought his soul had crossed
The bounds of death to float unshriven,
Unseen of God, forgotten, lost;
And then he hurtled, fiercely driven
Through sundered whirlpools, surges riven,
Aloft to gladsome regions where
Careered the breeze and beamed the moon.
He swam by instinct, scarce aware
That he was living yet; but soon
The life returned to brain and breath;
He longed to live; he flouted death.
He saw himself anear the shore,
Though down the river still he flew;
His fingers gripped a broken oar,
And near him tossed a wrecked canoe.
The speeding flood was white and rude
With frothy whirl and bubbly curl;
The flood was all a solitude,
And vanished was the wizard girl.

XIV

So ended Downing's first endeavor
To catch the Wampanoag maid;
He fared as mortals fare forever
In chasing lorelei, nymph and naiad;
He found the business wondrous dripping,
And much in need of first-rate shipping.

But even while he splashed for shore
He heard the clarion call of duty;
He raised his dexter fist and swore
To still pursue the heathen beauty;
Pursue and find her, though she stole
For hiding-place to stygian regions;
Convert her yet and save her soul
From Pandemonium's cunning legions.
So ever west, with patient labor,
His pistols slung about his waist,
And dragging twenty pounds of sabre,
Through boundless leafy lands he paced;
Because he thought an Indian maiden
And specially an eldritch thing,
Would fly to countries forest-laden
Where solitude as yet was king.

At last he reached a lordly current,
The Genesee of modern day,
Which flung a swift and massive torrent
Adown a ravine veiled in spray.
He halted there for food and slumber,
A mile or more above the roar,
And made a fragile float of lumber,

And fitted it with mast and oar;
Because, he judged, the wizard lady,
Would hope to ambuscade him there,
And come when all was still and shady
To spread a net and find a snare.

XV

He watched; she came; he saw her glimmer
Athwart the mellow dusk of night.
He saw her birchen paddle shimmer,
And dash the foam to left and right.
Through veiling leaves he knew the splendor
That brimmed her eyes and flushed her face,
The rounded figure, tall and slender,
The sway and gest of savage grace.
He launched his float; he never waited
To let her pass and choose her way;
He felt that every breath was fated,
And he must leap to win his prey.
He gained the middle stream before her,
And paused above the waterfall;
Then drew his pistol, aimed it o'er her,
And bade her halt or meet his ball.
And yet he purposed nothing evil,
His heart was kinder than his guise;
He only meant to cheat the devil,
He only meant to civilize.

XVI

The maiden stopped and gazed about her,
As undecided how to act.

How could she give her foe to slaughter
Unless she reached the cataract?
But soon a guileful thought befriended—
A shift of Indian stratagem;
Her ready paddle she extended,
And up the river turned her stem.
No doubt she hoped to see him wrestle
In vain against the torrent's sweep,
And founder like an iron pestle,
Or take alone the awful leap.
Away she flitted up the crystal
Descent of ripples, glinting by;
In vain our hero leveled pistol
And sent a warning bullet nigh.

He saw her 'scape; in vain he followed,
Or strove to follow, where she hied;
His clumsy float of timbers wallowed
And slowly slipped adown the tide.
Afar he saw the witch skedaddle
Through shade and moonlight intertwined,
And cursed the deftness of her paddle,
And cursed the cunning of her kind.
All night he fought with demon billows,
And only when the morn arose,
He reached a verdant bank of willows,
And dumbly dropped, and found repose.

An hour he slumbered; so he reckoned;
And then, ashamed of sluggard rest,
Arose to speed where duty beckoned
Athwart the everlasting West.

XVII

Ere many days he heard a roar
As though an angel stood before,
An angel of the judgment-day,
Who made his awful trumpet bray,
Commanding time to be no more.
It was Niagara, the strong,
The indescribable, the grand,
Fulfilling all surrounding land
With its amazing thunder-song,
And lifting such a lofty pyre
Of mists as though the seraph hosts
And multitude of sainted ghosts
Had truly gathered there in choir;
While over all—above the flow
Of emerald oceans leaping swift—
Above the spectral folds and drift—
Abode the sevenfold-tinted bow.
No marvel he whose wond'ring eyes
Beheld this otherworldly scene,
Discovered nothing there terrene,
But solely thought of Paradise,
Of seraphim with blinding wings,
Of pearly gates and precious stones
Too bright for earthly diadem;
Yea, thought of all immortal things
That dazzle souls of pardoned ones
In God's supreme Jerusalem.

XVIII

And, gazing thus, the fancy came
That here, where God appeared to sit,
And earth resounded to His name,
No evil sprite would dare to flit;
And one might find a shady knoll
Of rest for travel-wearied soul,
And there, recumbent, watch the leap
Of waters down the giant steep;
Or slumber tranquilly as man
Reposed when Tellus first began,
Ere Satan crossed the slough of Chaos
And brought his grisly son to slay us.
But this was error; had he dozed,
His haught career had doubtless closed;
For while he sought a sightly mound,
His hunter ear discerned a sound
Far different from plunging water—
A clamor eloquent of slaughter.
He heard a noise of singing men,
And peering down a sunny glen.
Enclosed by rustling curves of thicket,
He spied a score of painted braves,
A bloody gang of Mingo knaves,
Jigging as hard as they could kick it.

XIX

Our hero needed but a glance
To recognize the scalping dance,
For right amid the stamping throng

Of savage revelers, there hung
A dozen scalps of Saxon hair
Bestained with deadly clots of red,
And one with tresses flaxen-fair,
A trophy torn from woman's head.
The sight was pitiful; he thought
Of happy hamlets whelmed in flame,
Of gladsome hearts to anguish brought,
Of cord and torture, death and shame;
Yea, thought of all the griefs and ghosts
That filled those yelping mouths with boasts.
One thought of sorrow; then another
Of wrath; he swore to stop the breath
Of every red-skin man and brother
Who vaunted forth that song of death.
But he was one, and they were twenty;
How could he strive at even betting?
His pistol-balls were far from plenty,
His sabre dull with rust of wetting.
He saw that only Yankee cunning
Could beat the herd of Bashan cattle,
And strategy must set them running
Before he ventured closer battle.
So, while the mighty river thundered,
And bragging Mingos yelled like lawyers,
Our hero called to mind a hundred
Bushfighting tricks of Indian warriors.

XX

"At last" (thus read his Commentaries)
"I, Downing, rose upon my trotters,

An' shoved aside the leaves an' berries,
An' hollered louder than the waters.
They kinder harked, an' stopt their dancin,'
An' sorter made a start to foller;
But while they puzzled I was prancin'
To git another hole to holler.
I found it, an' agin I hooted,
This time, I reckon, rather louder;
Then squatted clost an' softly scooted
Along the brushwood quicker'n powder.
An' so from pint to pint I bellered
Enough to shake Apollyon's courage,
An' every time I done it, mellered
Their sposhy hearts to softer porridge.
I watched 'em, saw they wasn't steady,
But flocked in shaky squads together,
An' jedged that they were gittin' ready
To sport the whitest kind of feather.

"At last I showed my regimentals:
You oughter seen the creeturs travel!
They s'posed a thousen continentals
Had come to lay 'em under gravel.
Away they scooted, all a-straddle
To git aboard their flimsy birches,
An', launchin' spry, begun to paddle
Acrost the rapid's frothy curchies.
They scuffled smart, but man's resistance
Was naught amidst the river's revels;
I heern their deathsong in the distance,
An' seen 'em die like Mingo devils.
Then, bein' hungry as a sharky,

I made a dinner off their vittle,
And also grabbed a birchen barky
The coots had finished off to whittle."

XXI

If one should reach the gate of glory,
And see beside it falchions bare
And corpses lying pale and gory,
No doubt he would be all a-stare.

No doubt his joyous heart would sadden,
And he would look around him well
For earthly arms wherewith to madden
Against assailants fresh from Hell.

XXII

So wondering Downing changed in mood
Beside Niagara's heavenly doors,—
His battle ended with the brood
Of Mingos hot from guiles and gores.
If fiendish men defiled such place
With vaunting over fiendish sin,
He might expect the lorelei's face
And all the peril hid therein.
And so, when moonlit evening came,
He stretched himself beside the brink
Of waves bedight with argent flame,
And watched without a nod or wink.

XXIII

She came; athwart the trembling shade
That fringed a thicket-mantled isle,
He saw a boat; he saw the maid
Advance resplendent, sweet with guile.
He loitered not, he launched his bark
And drove it o'er the eddying mere,
Although he held belief that stark
And bony Death would seize him here.
But here he faltered not to die,
If only she might die with him;
And how could even lorelei fly
Destruction near that awful brim?
At first she paddled nigh to shore,
But quickly changed to reckless flight,
For Downing deftly used his oar
And toiled with superhuman might.
Erelong, far out upon the flow
Of ebon waves and snowy froth,
They tossed and fluttered to and fro—
A moth beside another moth.
And then the condor-current caught
And mastered them in demon claws;
And all was over—every thought
Of winning life, or even pause.

XXIV

No chance for human strength or skill!
The river wrought its single will;
It hurtled them as Winter flings

A leaf upon cyclonic wings;
Each second drove them swifter on,
And showed them death more nearly won:
Until, anon, they saw or guessed
The cataract's gleaming, hasting crest.
The hunter cast a glance before,
And calmly dropped his useless oar.
He gripped the thwarts and forward leaned
With settled brow and glances keened;
Nor did he gaze adown the surge,
But on the forest demiurge;
For much he feared lest even here
Some wizard chance might waft her clear;
And he was resolute as death
To clutch her, though with drowning breath.
But, fixedly as he might glare,
The maiden answered back his stare
As fixedly, and all the while
Allured him with a syren smile,
As though she keenly longed to win
His soul to deadly realms of sin.
And thus, without a pause or let,
With eyes upon each other set,
Amid the rapid's foam and hiss,
They sought the cataract's abyss.

XXV

As roars of lions welcomed those
Who died in coliseums old;
As earthquakes shout above the woes

They crush within their fiery hold;
So thundered forth that rushing deep
To those who shared its awful leap.
A fierce, incessant, deafening roll,
Unmatched solemnity of sound,
It shook the air, the solid ground,
It stunned the senses, numbed the soul.
It charmed in slaying, like the cry
Of ambushed tigers charming one
Who spies the monsters creeping nigh
And hears them snarl, yet cannot run.
Meanwhile the giant slayer had
No hate nor triumph in its tone;
No purpose, whether fierce or glad,
But mastered them as things unknown.
It saw them not, it felt them not;
They were as creatures unbegot.
They were a little froth—no more;
A breath amid that rush and roar.
They passed: no human word can tell
How suddenly they came and went:
One moment speeding tow'rd the hell
Of surges: then afar, or spent.
They flitted like a random thought;
Like ghosts they vanisht into naught;
For, long before they reached the base
Of that descending ocean, they
Were folded white from foot to face
In vasty winding-sheets of spray.
Yea, there the hunter lost his prey,
And drove alone, unknowing where,

Through fearful caves of maddened waves
That whirled and hurtled even there,
Like tigers struggling into graves
And battling over corpses bare.

XXVI

The man who wanders far with death
And peers within the ghostly gate
Hath many wondrous facts to state
If ever God restores his breath;
And who can marvel that the wight
Who plunged beneath Niagara's glooms,
Believed his spirit winged its flight
Afar within the realm of tombs?

Like favored souls of Grecian days
When Gods delivered pythian lays,
While yet the spirit-world was near,
And man was there and then was here,
Our hero passed the Stygian bounds
And saw the Happy Hunting Grounds;
Yea, many a famed and queenly squaw,
And many a valiant sachem, saw
Who drew the shaft against the ball
In vain, but fell as freemen fall.

There, crowned with plumes of eagle-wing,
Supreme amidst a glorious ring
Of braves, appeared the dreadful chief
Who bowed New England's head in grief,
And whirled her villages in flame,
And wrote in blood King Philip's name;

Unfading wrote it on the roll
Of those heroic sons of dole
Who strike for hearth and native land
With heavy heart but heavier hand,
And perish striking, yet live on
As though they fell at Marathon.

The sachem cast an angry stare
Upon the stranger's pallid face,
As all amazed that even there
Should come a man of English race;
Then sternly bent his mighty bow
And drew an arrow to the head
So swiftly that the shaft was red
Before the victim guessed the blow.
The paleface felt a madding pain;
He raised a feeble arm to strive;
He hoped he might be still alive,
Yet knew the weapon in his brain;
And then he felt his body hurled
By hands of superhuman might
Through surging atmospheres of night
Beyond the red-man's spirit-world.

No marvel Downing wrote with pen
In later days, that underneath
Niagara's tremendous seethe,
Endures the heaven of Indian men;
And there the awful sagamore
Awaits in arms a promised day
When he may hasten forth to slay,
And win his forest realm once more.

XXVII

He rose to life through raging seas;
He saw the sky, he caught the breeze;
He found himself without a wound,
Though gasping near to being drowned.
He headed tow'rd the southern coast,
And swam as never swam a ghost.
In vain the rapids barred and banned;
He tore his foaming way to land.
A minute's panting rest, and then
He stared about the rocky glen,
And down the river's bubbly glare
For her whose witchcraft brought him there.

Anon he saw her, living still
And far beyond his power to kill.
From dizzy cliffs above his head
She leaned to spy if he were dead,
And when he sought to win her shelf
She fled as flies a frighted elf.
He clutched for pistols all in vain;
The torrent bore them tow'rd the main.
Then, climbing swift, he won the dell
Where lately rang the Mingo yell,
And searched the thickets far and near
For tomahawk, or bow, or spear.

Some angel helped; he quickly found
A walnut bow of many a pound,
And twenty arrows pictured o'er
With quaint device of powwow lore;
And, being skilled in Indian charms

He knew that these were fated arms
Assured to slay each savage thing,
However swift of foot or wing;
Yea, also weird enough to smite
Whatever wizard haunts the night.
Thus armed, he shouted, "Shoulder hoo!"
And hasted westward, full of glee,
To strive with beast and bugaboo
And salvage grim and desert dree;
Yet never backward turn his shoe,
Nor ever fail in heart or knee;
But tramp Columbia through and through
From sunrise unto sunset sea;
And do the deeds of derring-do
That he could do, and only he.

XXVIII

The man who madly loves a maid,
And prays, "O sweet! become my bride!"
But finds his loving ill repaid,
And sees his worship flung aside;
Who learns that she will lure him on
Through sorrow, peril, loss and strife
Till hope is dead and life is done,
Nor ever yet become his wife;
How bitterly he yields to fate!
How vengefully he turns to hate!

XXIX

So changed desire our errant knight
Who lately strove with fervid might
To find the beauteous child of wrath
And shoo her out of Satan's path,
Yet gathered naught for all his pains
But travel-stains and weary reins
'Mid fastings, vigils, marches, squalls
And summersets down waterfalls;
In short, who lavished love and faith
To save a savage (or a wraith),
Yet saw his kindness paid with evil
Enough to tire the very devil.

His fervor cooled; he loathed the thought
Of meeting yet again her face;
He marveled how he ever sought
To do her any deed of grace.
The memory of her jeweled glance
No longer set his heart astir;
It seemed as though the sight of her
Would make him curse and turn askance.
He even loathed the mighty West,
And loathed the very setting sun,
But might not leave his task undone
Without a smirch upon his crest.
No marvel Downing changed in mind,
For far ahead the maiden flew,
And when he saw her face anew
The continent was half behind.

XXX

Yea, many setting suns he kenned,
And not a few of waning moons,
Primeval shades withouten end,
Or rivers, marshes, lakes, lagoons,
Before he spied that lass agen
Whose guileful beauty murdered men.
Yet oft beneath the pearl of dawn,
And oft in sunset's glowing rim,
(Distinct, although so far withdrawn)
He saw her gracious figure swim,
As valiant natures always spy
Their prey ahead, if not anigh.
Thus brightly dazzled on, he spanned
The Mississippi's turbid throng
Of waves to wastes of flowery land;
Nor halted yet, but fared along
To where the tides of buffalo
Hid earth beneath their ebb and flow.
The panther scented at his track,
And cantered off in stealthy flight;
The prairie-wolves' lugubrious pack
Beset his lonely bed till light;
A drove of horses stared aloof
And pranced anear on stormy hoof.

XXXI

He made a noose; he climbed a tree
And waited for a chance to cast;
Anon he softly laughed to see

The desert coursers grazing past;
The lariat fell with easy slide,
And Downing had a horse to ride.
He mounted while the savage rose,
And flew as though on eagle's wing.
No need of chirruping or blows;
No need of aught but strength to cling.
If ever wight rode madder course,
'Twas fated knight on demon horse.

In after years our hero wrote
(And printed, too, in text and note)
That this extremely welcome steed
Was not a jade of earthly breed,
But sent from Paradise or Hell
To work him either weal or wail,
Though which no theologue could tell,
Nor chief of Harvard or of Yale.
But this, perforce, we now believe:
No common charger might achieve
That arrowy rush, without a rest,
Across the broad, primeval West;
And certainly the headlong beast
Was frightfully bewitched, at least.

XXXII

On Downing went; the desert flung
Its doors agape to let him in;
And curious desert creatures hung
Upon his track with various din.
Grey wolves pursued him, lolling fire

And dropping foam of fierce desire
For hours and hours along his trail;
But found their iron muscles fail
And ceased to howl each other on,
And vanished rearward one by one.
Simooms of horses rushed to meet
His coming, joined him, kept beside
With straining neck and glinting feet
And fiery eyes and foamy hide;
And so would run the livelong day,
Till, wearied by his courser's stride,
They fell behind with wistful neigh
And stared afar to see him ride.
Uncounted bison thronged his flight
And westward flowed like tiding night.
They darkened leagues of treeless land,
And billowed close on either hand
With lurching hump and drooping head
And frothing mouth and glances red;
Yet sought no more to fight than flee,
And only surged beside his knee,
A dumb, uncouth, unreasoning throng
Which knew not why it toiled along.
For hours he drove through plunging ranks
Whose foam besprent his stallion's flanks;
For hours he scarcely saw the ground,
So thickly was he compassed round;
For dusty miles on dusty miles
He rode from jostling files to files;
Yet surely won his way before,
And found himself alone once more.

XXXIII

Grim horsemen, mounted like to him
On sinewy coursers wild as deer,
Arrived from desert edges dim,
With bow and quiver, shield and spear,
Their deerskins tossing on the air,
Their eyes aflame through ebon hair.
But when they spied the paleface nigh,
They whirled away with fearful cry
And rode athwart the rimless plain,
Low-bowed above the streaming mane,
As rideth one who flies a sprite,
Or fiend, or other parlous sight.
Again, for days he saw no face.
The land was manless where he came,
As though he drove the human race
Before him like a prairie flame.
The only man alive he seemed,
The last upon a sentenced earth;
For him alone the sunrise beamed,
For him the rainbow had its birth.
Yet, whether palled in solitude,
Or compassed round by salvage brood,
He rode with eager heart and gay,
Because afar he saw his prey
And closed upon her day by day.

XXXIV

The witches float on airy pinions
From setting sun to morning glow,
And find delight in weird dominions
Where saintly maid may never go.

For them the rugged way is level,
For them the darkling hour is bright;
They soar from revel on to revel,
From waltz to song the livelong night.

I trow the angels and the pardoned
Are often envious in their gaze
Because they see the spirits hardened
Float smiling down forbidden ways.

Ah, few divine the dreary labor,
The keen regret, the grim despair,
Of those who dance to pipe and tabor
With splendid princes of the air.

They only know their matchless sadness,
Their blighted hopes, their wasted years;
They know they are not sprites of gladness,
But prisoners of fears and tears.

XXXV

And such was she, the witch who hurried
Our knight across the desert plain;
Her cheek was wan, her glance a-worried,
Her body faint, her soul in pain.
She fled on drooping plumes of sorrow,

On wings of fright she journeyed west,
And often prayed to see no morrow,
If death might bring her any rest.
To God—the god of chiefs and sages—
The Mighty Soul of painted braves—
Who ruled our land in olden ages,
Before the paleface crossed the waves—
To him, the Sire of Earth and Water,
The Sagamore of Winds and Skies,
She pleaded, "Father, help thy daughter!
Thy weary daughter, ere she dies!"

But gods of faint and fading races
Are gods deposed, and gods no more.
No more they throne in lofty places,
No longer wield the bolts of yore.
No more they levin through the mountain,
No longer storm along the deep;
Their light has died on brook and fountain,
Their oracles have sunk to sleep.
They are but fiends and spirits fallen,
But brownies, loreleis, elves and fays;
They cannot help the souls who call on
Their names, or help in feeble ways.

So chanced it now with her who needed
Such aid as nothing might withstand;
The deity to whom she pleaded
Had lost the thunder from his hand.
The Master of the Indian Aidenn,
Bereft of half his ancient might,
Could do no more to save his maiden
Than send a beast to shield her flight.

XXXVI

At last our rider reached the border
Of stony steeps that fenced the plains,
And plunged amid a grim disorder
Of arid gorges delved by rains;
When suddenly he spied before him
A living hill of shaggy hair,
Equipped with mighty tusks to gore him
And trunk to fling him into air.

This was the pest of early races,
The Giant Bull of Indian creed,
The mastodon of college cases,
The finis of his precious breed.
No words can tell how vast a creature
He was in height and length and girth,
How terrible in mien and feature,
And how his trampling shook the earth.
His orbits, broad as coffee-saucers,
Shot flames from under grisly locks;
His codex, thick as frigate-hawsers,
Uprooted oaks and splintered rocks.

No doubt the boundless brute had frighted
Most heroes into fits of fear;
And Downing's self was scarce delighted
To see a mastodon so near.
In haste he waved his hat and helloed
To make the monster clear the path;
The monster stood his ground, and bellowed
As loud as Etna in its wrath.
The courser disappeared in terror

So quick and slick that Downing thought
That he perchance had been in error
In holding that a horse he brought.
But there was little time for wonder
Because his pony flew—or ran;
The mammoth roared again like thunder,
And charged as only mammoths can.

XXXVII

"The monster give me lots of trouble,"
Says Downing in his pictured page;
"He allays charged upon the double,
In spite of his unusyal age.
I had to skip like forty crickets
To dodge his vicious pokes an' hits;
For, as to skulkin' 'mongst the thickets,
He'd ripped a wilderness to bits.

"He charged an' charged an' kep' a-chargin',
As full of friskiness as spunk,
An' onst there warn't a finger's margin
Betwixt my bacon an' his trunk.

"I used the powwow's bow an' arrer,
Bewitched to kill at every lick;
An' every time he passed, I'd harrer
His highness with a whizzin' stick.
But, all the same, the pesky creetur
Would face about an' buck agin,
Nor didn't show in limb or feetur
The slightest sign of givin' in.
I had an awful lengthy battle

Afore I fetched a drop of blood,
An' want no more to do with cattle
Who orter drowned in Noah's flood.
"At last I sorter recollected,
While restin' on my twentieth pull,
How finely mammoths are purtected
By that tremenjous clip of wool.
So when the obstinate old bison
Discharged another cannon-roar,
I sent a yard of powwow-pizen
Full-chisel down his yawnin' bore.
The venom took like scarlet fever;
He stopped his rush an' stood aghast,
An' presently begun to weever
An' tremble like a fallin' mast.
His awful sasser-eyes were glassy,
His tongue was furred, his trotters sagged;
Then down he slammed! good lordamassy!
The biggest game I ever bagged!"

XXXVIII

Yes, there he lay, defunct and gory,
A mastodon, an adult male;
And whoso doubts the wonder-story
May see the skeleton at Yale.
Right welcome was the brawny sinner
To Downing, hungrier than a stork;
He sliced a tenderloin for dinner,
And used his sword for knife and fork:
The only knight of all the ages

Since Eros sang to fife and tabor,
Or Clio told of Ares' rages,
Who carved a mammoth with his sabre.
His hunger gone, he dozed a bit,
And then resumed his westward track,
Regretting much his wizard hack,
Although the brute was hard to sit;
For still, through morning's veil of grey,
Or sunset's glowing fleece of red,
He often saw the Indian fay
Flit weary on, not far ahead,
And, had his steed not taken leave,
He might have bagged her any eve.

XXXIX

At last he reached an elfin land,
A land where magic reigned supreme,
Fulfilled with shapes on every hand
More nondescript than shapes of dream;
For here (as Downing often told)
Titanic powwows, famed of old
Before Manitto lost his throne,
Had wrought their sorceries in stone.
Aloft, around, enchantments frowned,
Tall obelisk, colossal mound,
Rotunda, façade, temple-wall,
Keep, citadel, palatial hall,
Or endless burghs of spire and dome,
All sentinelled with imp and gnome,
Who scowled in flinty wrath or woe

To see the paleface tramp below.
Again, the desert glittered bright
With many colors, mingled stains,
Red, orange, purple, green and white,
Blue, sable, lilac, longdrawn veins,
That painted countless winding fells,
And beetling cliffs and herbless plains,
Or filled with witchcraft shadowy dells;
While here and there a magic wood
Of fallen stony trunks bestrewed
The vales with crimson jasper stems,
Or agate fit for diadems,
Or opal-tinted chalcedon:
The wizard-wolds of ages gone,
The wreck of primal hill and dale,
Swept down the wonder-stream of time
From hoary days of Saturn's prime
When monsters tracked the tender shale
And dragons soared above the slime.

XL

It seemed a mirage built of air,
Or boreal tints, or bubbles, wrought
To glow a moment false and fair,
Then vanish sparkling into naught.
It seemed no mortal land; it glared
Too prodigal in hue for earth;
It seemed a land that fiends had dared
To make in malice or in mirth;
A land of goblin shapes and tints,

Devised by seraphim perverse,
Full many wicked ages since,
To mock the Maker's universe.
Perchance the maiden hoped that here,
Where magic made its dwelling-place,
Her tracking foe might tread in fear,
Relax his pace, forsake his chase;
Or quit the cumbered way and roam,
Forever circling, till he died,
Like one who seeks without a guide
To thread a Roman catacomb.
But on he tramped with fearless stride
From elfin tower to demon hall,
Along the base of wizard wall,
Through Stygian forest stricken prone,
Through pandemoniums of stone,
Forever forward, ever west;
A dogging phantom, scorning rest,
Who never lost his quarry's track,
Nor left a footprint pointing back;
A cruel spectre fell as hate,
Preluding vast pursuing broods,
The first of deadly multitudes,
Precursor, herald, omen, fate!

XLI

So faring on from sight to sight,
He stumbled soon on ventures new,
Which none would dare receive for true,
Except that Downing's self did write

The prodigies with trusty pen,
And tell them oft to thankful men.
  The Painted Land was lately past,
And Downing strode a windy flat
Of gravel, when he heard a pat
Of footfalls coming like a blast;
And, glaring back, he saw a herd
Of pigmy steeds pursuing fast
With steaming mouth and flying mane,
Although no human rider spurred,
Nor had they ever known the rein.
They skirred like cats; they skimmed the ground;
And none was taller than a hound.
They sped like wind; they overran
And circled round that lonely man,
Menacing, scarce a rod aloof,
The weirdest nags since Noah's flood;
For every one had cloven hoof,
The signature of fiendish blood.
  No man divineth whence they came:
Perhaps from Eblis-caves of flame:
Perhaps from wildernesses known
To imps and sorcerers alone;
But certainly they thronged to aid
The hunted Wampanoag maid.

XLII

  Our hero had a lovely fight,
The strangest known to mortal wight,
A scrap with ponies devil-born,

Who threshed him like a sheaf of corn.
The air was full of talon-feet,
All banging Downing's sacred meat.
In vain he charged the elfin foes;
His valor won but harder blows.
In vain he sabred, vainly shot;
The ponies paid him hot-and-hot.
His carcass bore the dints and nicks
Of something like two hundred kicks.
No other champion known to fame
Such drumming ever got, or shame,
As Downing in his famous row
With palfreys footed like a cow.

At last, when battle seemed in vain,
And Paradise too near and plain,
A dusty whirlwind brought him aid,
As Cyprian Venus, robed in shade,
Through Ilian sunlight flew to save
Her Phrygian prince from Grecian glaive.
Our Yankee spake no parting word,
But darted panting through the herd,
And, scuttling fifty yards unseen,
Attained a river's huge ravine,
Where, scrambling o'er the rocky edge,
He perched upon a dizzy ledge.

A moment's peace, a moment's breath,
And then, with piercing, cattish neigh,
Those quadrupeds of Satan tore
To seek their prey and catch their death;
For, plunging o'er the rocky brae,
And tumbling half a mile or more,

They perished all that very day,
As scholars know who thither go
To find their skeletons below.

XLIII

Full little recked our errant knight
What coursers these might be, or when
They bursted out of primal night
To batter paleolithic men;
For, staring down with gladsome soul,
To watch the cursed pigmies roll,
He saw a spectacle that reft
His mind from everything beside;
He saw a mighty river stride
In frenzy through a mountain cleft,—
A river that fulfilled his gaze
With something wilder than amaze.
A thousand yards below the eye
It foamed, between titanic walls
So dizzy high they seemed anigh,
Though far apart for trumpet-calls.
And both the lofty ramparts frowned
In shapes like masonries of man:
Swart fortresses a league around,
Dike, castle, turret, barbican,
Or altars, temples, pagods vast,
Where stony demons scowled aghast;
Yea, everywhere the fiends had built
Some lair of cruelty and guilt
As huge and grim and horrible
As are the palaces of Hell.

Below,—far down,—alone,—in gloom,—
The haunting Jinn of a giant tomb—
A river hurled its glittering spume,—
A prisoned sprite that sought to flee—
A captive mad to reach the sea
And perish there, but perish free.

XLIV

In any world of sin or bliss
No other river is like this,
So horrible, so stern, so sad,
So dungeoned close, so raving mad.
It seems an angel fallen, curst,
Forever ruined, knowing the worst,
Abhorred, pursued and scourged for crime,
Yet ever fierce, superb, sublime,
And grandly suffering alone,
Like Satan on his burning throne.
And he who gazed upon it then
Believed he gazed on demon tide,
Right perilous to lives of men,
And perilous to souls beside;
Yet faltered not to follow it,
For, far along the awful moat,
He saw the wizard maiden sit
A billow-tost and fleeting boat.
He knew his prey; he left the brow;
He won the base, no matter how;
Such heroes win whatever aim,
Though death confront and Eblis flame.
The strand attained, he bounded swift

O'er frothing rift and bowlder drift
Until he found a frowsy kraal,
Half burrowed 'neath the mountain wall,
Whose naked folk had fled before
That avalanche of eldritch steeds,
But left upon their darkling shore
A skiff that suited Downing's needs.
He launched in waves of speeding snow,
He made the lumpish paddle quiver,
And flew as though Apollo's bow
Had sent him whizzing down the river.

XLV

I trow that every stream enchanted
Is passing glorious to behold;
I trow its magic banks are haunted
By goblin lords of mighty mould.

I trow those demons live in pleasure,
Begirt with tower and castle wall,
And often tread the festive measure,
And banquet oft in princely hall.

And whoso reaches those dominions,
They look adown and beck him in
Because they long for earthly minions
To serve for them at feasts of sin.

Ah, bitter woe to dazzled mortals
Who enter where the fiends ordain!
For none who pass those iron portals
Shall issue forth or smile again.

Yea, also woe to spirits daring
  Who shake the head and hasten by!
For griefs will follow their wayfaring
  Until they envy those who die.

No, neither just nor evil liver
  May wholly 'scape from hazards fell,
Who ventures down enchanted river
  And dares the seraphim of Hell.

XLVI

However fair to fiendish sprites
That magic valley may have been,
It gloomed to Downing's troubled een
The horriblest of earthly sights.
On every side the horizon
Was half a league above his head;
The welkin was an azure thread
'Twixt dizzy walls of jagged stone.
He saw no blooming, verdant thing,
Nor any beast, nor any bird;
That woful torrent never heard
The heavenly sound of song or wing.
  The lanskip seemed a part of Hell,
Except that smoke and flame had failed;
You marveled why no demon sailed
With shrieks along the fearful dell.
It had a countenance like sin,
It had a countenance like death;
The gazer almost lost his breath
To think that he was caged therein.

It bosomed many monstrous seats
Of ruin, marvelous in form;
And every one upheld a swarm
Of stony goblins and afreets.
Yea, every cyclopean hold,
Keep, turret, castle, knightly pile,
Pagoda, temple, altar, aisle,
Was browed with devils manifold.
From every face and front and height
The surly horrors glared adown,
Some forward leaned with spiteful frown,
Some starting back in hideous fright.
On every flinty lip a curse
Of ghoulish hate was petrified,
As though malignantly they died,
Impenitent, for aye perverse.
Words cannot tell how fierce they were,
Nor how their horror filled the place;
It seemed that never hope of grace
Might visit him who wandered there.

XLVII

Beneath these altitudes of woe
The cursed river, far below,
Fled arrow-like with endless moan
Along a groove of solid stone;
Now speeding sheets of lucent glass
Adown a straight and roomy pass;
Now tossing crests of angry foam
By thwarting pinnacle and dome;

Now charging over waterfalls
With glinting hoofs and trumpet-calls;
Forever mad to reach the main,
To 'scape its dungeon, break its chain.
The jinns of that infernal land
Pursued our knight with heavy hand,
And vexed him sore for venturing in
Their realm of punishment and sin.
A dozen cataracts a day
He ran in hissing foam and spray;
A dozen times he lost his boat,
Rejoiced if he himself could float;
A dozen times, if not a score,
He swam to gather bark and oar;
And recommenced with constant soul
His venture down the stream of dole.
A month he chased the flying maid,
And then another, undismayed
By coiling eddy, leaping wave,
By deserts lonesome as the grave,
By goblin palace, wizard lair,
By impish scowl or ghoulish glare.
But eftersoon (while flitting swift
Along a shadowy mountain rift,
A dizzy mile from brow to base,
Where never midday showed its face)
He met a host of savage foes
And half rejoiced to feel their blows,
So dreary was his soul, so fain
To greet some living wight again.

XLVIII

No doubt the centuries of old,
Ere Adam walked in Paradise,
Had beasts of various monstrous mould
Whose forms would thunderstrike our eyes.
But none of those abnormal shapes
Would fright us nearer unto death
Than certain birds, as big as apes,
Whose yardlong bills were fringed with teeth.
Such nondescripts, the very last
Of their primeval, devilish breed,
Now hasted swift as mountain blast
To serve the Wampanoag's need.

In all the years that Downing fought
He waged no madder, wilder strife;
And more than once he grimly thought
Those snapping fowl would end his life.
They wheeled above with deafening shriek,
They banged with pinion, tore with beak,
And fetched the gore in many a streak.
In vain he hurtled blow on blow;
His sabre merely gashed the air.
In vain he drew his wizard bow;
The creatures dodged, with room to spare.
At last, despairing how to win
The puzzling fight by martial might,
The fancy came that he might grin
The feathered pests to death, or flight.

Like Crockett he could grin the bark
Off gnarled and knotty oaken trees

And leave the awestruck wood as stark
And glossy as a Holland cheese.
But how should merely human jaws
Excel in grinning goblin things
Who had as many teeth as saws,
And bills outmeasuring their wings?
They formed a circle round the chief
And grinned as only they knew how;
They smirked him nearly blind and deaf,
They smiled him raw from chin to brow.
They grinned his epaulets to dust,
The lace and buttons from his suit;
They grinned his scabbard clean of rust,
They nearly grinned him to a brute.
The hero's strategy was lost
On hostiles built for dental fame;
And so, in anguish terror-tost,
He sabred on till evening came.

XLIX

Till evening came he sabred on,
And then the victory was won;
For Beelzebub had made his fowls
With other views of life than owls.
They dropped asleep at sunset hour
Precisely like a closing flower,
Nor ever knew what happened next;
For Downing, panting forth a text
Of jubilee, put sword in sheath,
And sawed their heads off with their teeth.

Again victorious in fight,
He dallied not till morning light,
But dared the murky stream and flew
To prodigies and perils new.
Another day, aye many more
He quivered swiftly down the roar
And spume of that enchanted tide,
With goblin sights on every side,
So nondescript in shape and size,
So madly marvelous in dies,
So otherworldly and unsightly,
That he alone can paint them rightly.

L

"I'll do my very best endeavor,"
He writes in tones of modest doubt,
"To give a notion of the river
An' countries piled up roundabout.
The banks got loftier an' steeper
A mile or two from top to base;
While, underneath, the trough got deeper,
The current speedier in pace.
"I spanked along through signs an' wonders
Tremenjous big, but all in ruins,
Which seemed to me like Satan's blunders,
Instead of Heavenly Wisdom's doins.
I saw pagodas, domes, pavilions
Consid'able like works of Hindoos,
With spires an' pinnacles by millions,
An' hoss-shoe doors an' p'inted windows;

No eend of battlements an' ditches,
Redoubts an' bastions, gates an' towers,
As though the fallen spooks an' witches
Expected siege by angel powers;
And, now an' then, a mile-long frigate
Aground upon a mile-high crag,
With goblins bustlin' round to rig it,
Or histin' up old Nipton's flag;
Besides the most enormous picturs!
A mile of paint at every whack!
Red, yaller, purple, speckled mixturs,
Or grizzled, foxy, green an' black.
"In idol-fixins there were Dagons
An' Baals an' Molochs by the hunderd,
An' many other gods of pagans,
The biggest part all cracked an' sundered.
No eend of shapes from morn to sundown
Of every size an' every kind;
Three hundred miles my barky run down
Afore I left the town behind.
An' nawthin' right, or straight, or solid
From north to south; it seemed a pity
Hard-workin' imps should be so stolid,
An' only build a ruined city.

LI

"In short, the place was awful leaky,
An' skussly fit to shelter codgers;
But, shaky though it was an' leaky,
It had a swarmin' swath of lodgers.

On every side were tribes an' nations
Of spooks an' fiends as black as jet,
Who sot outside their habitations,
As though the rooms were overhet.
At first I felt a leetle skeery
To see 'em standin' round so large;
But purty soon I got more cheery
An' quite disposed to make a charge;
Because I presently diskivered,
By dint of boldly pokin' round,
The struttin' fiends were chicken-livered
An' not the chaps to hold their ground.
I couldn't make 'em face a scrimmage,
For when they spied old Downing come,
They had a way of changin' image
To make believe they wer'n't to hum.
They looked Apollyons, fierce an' furious
Enough to make apostles run;
But when you mounted 'em 'twas curious
How suddintly they'd turn to stun.

"To-wit, I cruised around a castle
Ten times as big as Bunker Hill,
Where devils challenged me to wrastle
On every stoop an' winder-sill.
But when I landed clost below it,
With hopes to capture what was in it,
The foxy creeturs seemed to know it,
An' changed to granite in a minute.
'Twas jest the same in forty places:
I'd see the longtailed imps in flocks,
A-bendin' down their hornèd faces;

An' then I'd reach a pile of rocks.
I couldn't find a hoof or feather,
Nor catch a whiff of brimstun smell;
But all the same, I'd bet a wether
I traveled through a part of hell."

LII

So sturdy Downing wandered down
The wizard canon of the West,
And only saw a Stygian town
Where some would spy the mansions blest,
Or pillared jinn, or chained afreet,
Or hear the loreleis chanting sweet.
Its solemn gulfs and awful steeps,
Its crests and pinnacles sublime,
Its giant cities, hurled in heaps,
Its wondrous mimicry and mime
Of every mighty work that man
Has builded since the world began,
Its glories all, were naught to him
But lairs of fiendish seraphim.
A solid knight of common sense,
A puritan of faith intense,
He knew Apollyon's sooty face
Behind the veil of fay or grace;
He saw his gloomy wings o'erspread
Sublime abyss or mountain head,
And felt his deadly malice quiver
In every fair enchanted river.
But like the most of humankind,

He found the things he looked to find;
He found the demons and their power
From early dawn to sunset hour;
He felt their poisoned talons rive
Wherever he might drive or strive;
And here especially he knew
The crowning rage of Satan's crew,
The utmost malice Hell could brew.
Full oft its spunkies overset
His skiff and left him dripping wet;
Or dragged him like a helpless girl
For hours around an eddy's whirl;
Or slung him like a javelin
Adown a cataract's foaming din.
From morn to night they plagued his path;
For many a day he felt their wrath.

LIII

At last he 'scaped that realm accurst;
Athwart its southern gate he burst.
He saw the demon ramparts rise
Behind, against the northern skies.
The river dimpled smooth and clear
Through forests gay with flowery dies,
And songs of birds rejoiced his ear.
The world was still alive, he knew,
And knew it with a glad surprise,
And almost wept to find it true,
Such thankful heartbeats reached his eyes.

He glanced ahead; he spied his prey,
And cheerly hasted on his way,
Like one who sees a prize anear,
A glorious guerdon long since due,
The wage of many a toilsome year,
A trophy sought since life was new.
He felt athirst; he dipped his hand,
And found the savor of the sea;
The continent was past, and he
Had entered into sunset-land.
That hour the Wampanoag lost
Her witchcraft,—lost her strength to fly;
He saw her useless paddle crossed,
Her visage drooped as though to die.
He reached and clutched her nerveless arm;
He dragged her in his own canoe;
Then sate and gazed, nor offered harm,
For sudden pity smote him through.

LIV

She veiled her head to welcome death;
She uttered not a pleading breath.
He seemed to have before his face
The very last of a fallen race,
The last of many a tribe and clan,
The final soul of red-skinned man.
He could not even wish to slay
A thing so pitiful and meek.
Instead, he raised his hand to stay
A tear from sliding down his cheek.

He felt like one who journeys slow
In some funereal train of woe,
And cannot find a bitter word,
Although the corpse to be interred
Was once his hated, harmful foe.
  Awhile they floated down the tide,
And still the maiden never sighed,
Nor uttered any speech of wail,
Although perhaps her spirit cried
To gods who helped her sires prevail,
Or bravely bear the mortal blow,
In forest battles long ago.
At last there came a gentle shiver,
And calmly lifting up her veil,
She showed a visage wan and pale,
But full of witchery as ever.
One glance aloft, to morning's glow,
That seemed to say, "Manitto, hail!"
Then softly rocking to and fro,
She poured her deathsong o'er the river.

LV

I am of Wampanoag race;
  I come of many sagamores.
My fathers saw the white man's face.
  And gave it welcome to their shores.
They welcomed it, and where are they?
Who was it trampled them to clay?

I bear the blood of Metacom,*
The chief of Wampanoag chiefs.
He struck to save his forest home,
He struck at insolence and griefs.
Aye, who forgot his father's name,
And broke his brother's heart with shame?

He filled New England earth with graves:
He filled New England air with fire:
He slew a thousand paleface braves:
Slew child and mother with the sire;
He paid the blood-debt every whit,
And I am glad to think of it.

Where are the warriors of my clan?
They sleep as sleep the valiant dead.
There was no Wampanoag man
But fell with hatchet dripping red.
Your longknives heard their dying groans:
Your ploughshares grate among their bones.

They left to me what freemen could
Who perished for their homes in vain;
They left a heritage of blood,
Of vengeance crazing heart and brain:
A mission to avenge their fate,
A deathless heritage of hate.

*The Indian name of King Philip. His elder brother, imprisoned in profound peace by the settlers, died of humiliation. His wife and son were sold into slavery in the West Indies.

But now my lifelong task is done,
For I have reached the further West,
The ocean of the setting sun,
Where all our homeless tribes will rest,
Will halt beside the pathless deep
And sing their funeral songs, and sleep.

Thank Heaven! the paleface cannot save!
He cannot put aside my hour.
I would not live to be a slave,
Nor even honored in his power.
I come, O Metacom, to thee,
As fits a Wampanoag, free!

She ended here her funeral chant,
And while her captor harkened still,
She rose and threw herself aslant
So quick he could not check her will—
So quick he hardly drew a breath
Before she passed the gate of death.

THE GENTLE EARL

III

THE GENTLE EARL

I

Full many knight puts lance in rest
Against a foeman fair in front,
Expecting there to fight his best
And there to find the battle's brunt,
Nor doubts that yet a fiercer foe
Behind him comes at charging speed,
Who levels spear to lay him low
Before he does a valiant deed.

So Downing rode from day to day
With loaded gun and sharpened steel
To seek adventure far away
And shiver skulls for others' weal,
Nor guessed that, had he bided home,
And calmly dozed in elbow-chair
His dourest enemies had come
To wage him bitter battle there.

Without a fear the hero went;
He held that Shiloh dwelt secure;
He trusted angel-pinions bent
Above his child and kept her sure;
And all his knightly spirit leaned
A-front to spy the sooty wings
Of fallen angel, imp and fiend,
And hear their frightful challengings.

For lately woful tidings ran
That lofty potentates of sin
Had entered Salem with their clan
And built anew their state therein;
Proposing thence to clamor down
(Believe the story those who will)
And scourge with burnings Boston town
And drive our flag from Bunker Hill.

II

He reached the town at sunset stroke,
And found it bare of christian folk;
For none who dreaded Satan's snares,
Or valued sleep or evening prayers
Would bide within a haunted land
Where Tophet held the upper hand,
Where every night the lanskip shook
With rigadoons of witch and spook,
And even sheriffs stirred their boots
To flight before Apollyon's hoots.

Through desert ways the hero hied,
With silent homes on either side,
Nor creature spied of mortal frame,
Unless perchance a withered dame
Of evil fame for dance and song
At mid of night with Satan's throng.

Anon he won the oaken wood
Where Tophet's mongrel multitude
Rejoiced to waltz the night away
In Reverend Cotton Mather's day.

Yet there he found but evening dusk,
Perfumed by yellow woodbine musk,
And brightly rayed with argent sheaves
Of moonlight sliding through the leaves.
He tethered horse and paced the shade
With pistol cocked and naked blade;
For hours he wandered to and fro,
Alive to every firefly's glow,
To every hoot of owl, or flight
Of bat or insect through the night;
Hoping at every breath to hear
The hellish anthem storming near;
But watching, harking all in vain
Until a terror filled his brain
Lest Belial's crew had spied him there
And called its congress otherwhere.

III

But when the hour of midnight fell,
No doubt, no doubt, there was a hell!
He heard its awful legions come
Through distant gloom with swelling hum,
As though Apollyon's rebel sprites
That moment fell from Eden's heights,
An avalanche of sin and woe,
Tremendous e'en in overthrow.
Afar he heard them; then anear;
A levin brood, both there and here;
Their pinions filling night with soughs,
And smiting 'thwart the groaning boughs,

As though contending tempests drove
On mighty pens along the grove.
The air was ghastly overhead
With monsters fit to fright the dead:
The shapes that fallen angels wear
To symbolize their fierce despair:
Unshriven ghouls in winding sheets,
Fantastic hydras, swart afreets,
Titanic dragons winged with fire,
Or formless forms—chimaeras dire:
With clouds of weirdly pigmy things
Who whirred like bats on leathery wings,
All settling black on either hand
And smutting miles of forest land.
Behind arrived the wizard broods
In pairs, in flocks, in multitudes,
The women flaunting through the gloom
On shooting switch or bouncing broom;
The men astride of bucking goat,
Or wayward calf, or wheezing shoat.
Of every age and rank they came,
The lowly scrub, the dainty dame,
The ruffled squire, the ragged boor,
The Indian tramp, the smirking moor,
The puckered hag, the brazen jade,
With here and there a rosy maid
Whose visage wore a seraph-smile,
Yet had an undergleam of guile.

IV

And Downing spied among the crew
At least a dozen whom he knew
And hitherto had held for sure
As chosen spirits, levites pure,
Nor guessed that, underneath their show
Of sanctimonious joy or woe,
They were the sons of Ashtoreth
And walked in secret ways of death.
Immensely dazed our hero was
To find the squires of Zion's laws
Communing with the rascal horde
Of those who call the devil Lord.
But being blest with Yankee sense,
He straightway drew the inference
That all who taste of sin's delight
In open day or veiling night,
No matter how they garb their lives,
Are neophytes of wizard hives
Who come perforce to Satan's whirls
And dance to every tune he skirls.
Yet all the keener grew his fear
Because he found acquaintance here;
For doubts befell lest even he
Had bended unaware the knee
To reverence the lord of Dis,
And might receive the branding kiss,
And find himself among the mell
Of those who jig their way to hell.
The whimsy scared; he turned to go;

He fled on skulking tip of toe;
He groped in whirls of sulphur-smoke,
And fell within a hollow oak;
There, goggling through a gnarly hole,
He watched aghast the hideous shoal
Of wizard, fiend and imp and troll.

V

Anon a silence fell; and then
The giant Enemy of men
Arose with pipe in hand, and blew
A rune that pierced the forest through
With melody grotesque and shrill,
Yet sweet enough to bow the will,
To fire the blood and turn the brain,
To make a man forget his pain,
Or joy, forget his natal sod,
His very name, his very God.
Our hero marveled much to weet
A note so ravishing and sweet,
So otherwise from all that he
Had thought infernal tunes to be;
And, harking still, he felt a strong
Desire to join the warlock throng,
And bow before the devil's throne,
And dance, although he danced alone.
How think of duty, think of shame,
How care for honor's haught acclaim,
For altars, fires and native land,
Or seraph choir, or sainted band,

When trills of demon music stole
From bar to bar of all the soul?
When earth and Eblis listened mute
To Lucifer's beguiling flute?
But halting yet in ways of guilt,
He chanced to touch his sabre's hilt.
The touch was magical; once more
He heard Columbia's battle roar;
He heard through smoke of volleying guns
Undaunted Freedom call her sons,
The drummer's roll, the bugler's peal,
The hissing ball, the clashing steel;
He heard them clear, he heard them all,
And answered back the glorious call.
The fighting blood of a valiant race
Rolled flaming through his farmer face;
He drew his blade and forth he ran
To die perchance, but die a man.

VI

What evil thing of hell or earth
Can bravely meet a soul of worth?
A thousand demons, gathered there,
Dispersed before one patriot's stare.
They knew Columbia's federal head,
And leaped aloft in sudden dread;
Yea, trolls and wizards, imps and spooks
Flew up the trees like frighted rooks.
But, when they saw a single wight
Defied their many-headed might,

They rustled down with thunder-shout
And hemmed him closely roundabout,
A weirder, wickeder array
Than ever dares the face of day,
All watching him with settled eyes
Of fury mixed with stark surprise.
A little pause. Then forward came
A wretch who mumbled Downing's name;
A ghastly creature, stiff and cold,
A ghoul escaped from burial mould,
The carrion of a deacon whom
Our chief had followed to the tomb,
A month agone, and left him there
With bended head and mournful stare.
This foul apostate, full of guile,
Advanced with stony eye and smile
And proffered fist, but all the while
His speechless muzzle yawned apart
To suck the blood of Downing's heart.
Aroint! what worthy wight could take
In patience that cadaverous shake,
The touch of that defiling hand!
Our Greatheart flashed his ready brand
Athwart the smirking, noisome hound,
And spread his halves along the ground.
Instanter all that wizard troop
Volcanoed forth a mongrel whoop,
A discord vast of yelp and howl,
Of hoot and snarl and bleat and growl;
While many-fashioned hideous maws
Disparted: alligator jaws,

Revealing yards of glinting teeth,
Or goatish mouths with beards beneath,
Viparian muzzles, clattering bills,
And tuskéd snouts and scaly gills;
All pouring spiteful threats and jeers,
While Downing vainly stopped his ears.
A moment thus they lifted high
Their slogan, scaring earth and sky:
And then the wondrous fight began—
All Eblis 'gainst a single man.

VII

"It was the daintiest of brushes,"
Our Yankee Caesar calmly writes,
"An' what with double teeth an' tushes
I got a fisher's luck of bites.
The stunted trash begun the flurry,
As leetle chaps are apt to dew;
They scaled around me hurry-scurry
With every kind of spit an' mew.
They stung an' pizened like muskeeters
Until I fairly danced with pain,
An' rubbed me with their bristly feeturs,
An' allays rubbed agin the grain.
But, what was specially disgustin',
They'd skip atop of me an' crow
To make believe that I was bustin'
An' hadn't many steps to go.
But all the same, I kep' a-whirlin'
My hefty sabre 'round my head,

An' sent at least a hundred skirlin',
An' left a hundred more for dead.
"At last I druv the pigmy passel
To scatter out an' fly like chaff;
An' then begun the serious wrastle
With Beelzebub an' puss'nal staff.
The first I tackled was a dragon,
A dozen yards from snoot to tail,
With eyes a chap could hang a flag on,
An' pinions like a lugger's sail.
But when I punched the bloated critter
I found him nawthin' but a skin;
He wasn't even stuffed with litter,
An' vanished when I punched agin.
That raised my grit; I recollected
That Satan flies the spunky saint;
An' so I purty soon dissected
Another dragon's gilt an' paint.

VIII

"'Twas jest the same with all the boodle
Of shapes from regions underneath;
They couldn't face a puppy poodle
Who had the grit to show his teeth.
I collared demon, imp an' devil,
Apollyon, Moloch, Beelzebub,
An' made the puffy vermin travel
Like squirrels through the oaken scrub.
They stood about as poor a tussle
As flocks of guinea-hens an' geese;

In fact they hadn't any muscle,
An' didn't weigh a pound apiece.
"The only shapes that give me trouble
Belonged to granther Noah's herd;
For instance, wizards an' their rubble
Of ghoul an' vampyre, beast an' bird.
The women sartinly did scuffle
An' scratch an' claw like all possest;
They didn't leave me half a ruffle,
Nor nary button down my vest.
The warlocks, too, were tough curmudgeons
Who did their best to whack an' stab
With pitchforks, cobblestones an' bludgeons,
Or any wepm they could grab.
"I had an hour or two of battle
Afore I druv the human crowd,
Whereas the longtailed, flying cattle
Of Hell had vanished like a cloud;
From whence I dare to draw conclusion
That only spooks of mortal birth
(Ourselves perhaps) can work confusion,
An' reely hurt the sons of earth.
Now, like enough you've heerd the stories
That all my wizards, imps an' sprites
Were nawthin more 'n a troop of tories
Who met in Salem woods of nights.
But never mind these doubts an' cavils:
They worry Downing not a jot;
He fought with somethin'—men or devils,—
An' won the fight—no matter what."

IX

The parlous strife was scarce completed
Before a headlong rider came,
His rowels red, his courser heated,
His visage pale, his eyes a-flame,
Who touched his hat in salutation
And shouted, "Putnam sends me here
To tell you how the bulls of Bashan
Are charging round our flanks and rear.
From Canada Burgoyne is striding
To reach us through the Hudson way,
While other scarlet hordes are gliding
From Newport up Rhode Island Bay.
Nor pillage do they crave, nor slaughter;
They come with neither cord nor fire;
They only seek your gracious daughter
To hold in hostage for her sire.
For seers have told the king of Britain
That whilst your mighty arm is free,
The Lion shall be surely smitten,
And Yankees never bow the knee."
Thereon the rider wheeled and hurried
Away o'er meadow, hill and dell,
While Downing straddled mare and scurried
To succor Shiloh ere it fell.

X

This planet hath no fairer sight
Than men who march in ranks aright,
Responding to the drummer's beat

With measured tread of sounding feet,
Their shining arms at even slant
And not a visage turned askant,
The column straight from front to rear
And angled like a shapely pier,
As though a granite wall should come
Along the ways to sound of drum.
So marched the scarlet-coated men
Who sought the Shiloh Lion's den;
While tory horse in careless ranks
Patrolled the van, the rear, the flanks;
And, far in advance, loosely strayed
Six braves to watch for ambuscade.
Some yards before the musketeers
A fiery courser pricked his ears
And stamped the earthly ways in scorn
As though he were a steed of Morn
Who longed to set his wings a-flare
And transverse avenues of air.
This charger lightly bore along
The chief of all the martial throng,
A gracious youth of noble mould
In brave attire of red and gold.
Whose lilied cheek and flaxen curls
Reminded one of youngling girls.
A noble youth he surely was,
Who dearly loved his country's cause,
And loved his king with reverence,
Nor dreaded death in their defence;
Who also loved his ancient name,
And longed to give it statelier fame

Than any that his sires had won
Crusading 'neath Judean sun;
And therefore loved the trumpet's bray,
The battle set in proud array,
The volley's crash, the cannonade,
The gleam of bayonet and blade.

XI

No lord was he of mean degree,
But famed for state and pedigree.
Of many castles was he heir,
And none a castle in the air;
But each upon its craggy steep,
A massy pile of tower and keep,
Wherein were story-haunted halls
With armored shapes along the walls;
And each within a spacious fief
Of grain and turf and oaken leaf,
Where ravens prophecied of woe
To antlered deer a-drowse below.
But (better loved than all of this)
He left behind a mother's kiss,
And also left the pure embrace
Of girlish sisters, fair of face,
Who yet of lovers had no ken,
And thought him grandest man of men.
He carried next his gentle heart
Their letters sweet, and, while apart
From other folk, would read anew
The kindly wish and fond adieu,

And gladly think of days to come
When glorious peace would send him home
To hear those blessing angels speak,
With tears and kisses on his cheek.

XII

He held a letter even now
Beneath his eyes and bended brow
When suddenly arose the keen
Crack of a Mingo carabine;
And, glancing down a sidelong rift,
He spied a maiden riding swift
While close behind her lightly ran
A leather-garbed and painted man.
In vain she rode; the cunning shot
Had deftly sought a vital spot.
He saw the courser plunge and die;
He saw the maiden rise and fly;
He saw the Mingo's gleaming knife,
And spurred amain to save a life.
He won; he tore the maid from death;
He reached her while she stopped for breath
And turned with horror-stricken glance
To face the wolfish foe's advance.
He fiercely wheeled his fiery bay,
And drove the savage from his prey.
She seemed a maid of twenty years;
Her eyes were azure through her tears;
Her countenance was passing fair,
Despite the pallor of despair;

Her golden locks had broken free,
And she was gold from crown to knee,
A creature beautiful to see.

XIII

I find that never wight of worth
Can go, no matter where, on earth,
But men divine his honored name,
And point him out, and tell his fame.
This lordly youth could scarcely save
An ambushed girl from savage glaive
And hide her safe behind his van,
Before a passing dotard man
Uplifted ragged hat and smiled,
And greeted her as Downing's child.
Ah! mighty was the captor's joy;
He colored like a gladdened boy;
For chance had compassed what he planned,
And triumph overbrimmed his hand.
But all the hotter flushed his face
Because his captive's piteous grace,
(Unconsciously and lacking guile)
Had made him long to win her smile.
So, while he faced his ranks about
And cheerly trode the seaward route,
He brought her wherewithal to ride
And journeyed courteous by her side,
Beseeching pardon for the wrong
He did in haling her along;
Or grieving o'er the bloody shame

Of strife 'twixt men of English name;
Or trusting that her sire would bring
New loyalty to crown and king,
And garner clemency for those
Who now were Britain's valiant foes;
With many other words of ruth.
Befitting well a noble youth
Who followed gentilesse in sooth.

XIV

It is an easy thing, I hold,
For youngling souls of kindly mould,
Who journey lonely side by side,
To think of altar, groom and bride.
So presently this English earl
Began to love our Yankee girl,
And strove with every tender art
To reach the heaven within her heart;
Though gallantly ashamed to tell
His suit to captive damozel,
So virginal was he in soul,
So chivalrous and soft to dole.
Yet many gracious words he passed,
And many yearning glances cast,
Or smiled to meet her dreamy gaze,
And offered service in courtly ways.
But how could Esther think of love?
Her mind was drawn to things above;
Her heart was otherworldly pure.
She knew no girlish guess or lure;

And when she lifted up her eyes
Of azure light to azure skies
She purposed not to dazzle men,
Nor guessed that she was comely then;
She only lifted them to pray
That worldly thoughts might pass away.

XV

By day the column seaward strode—
At night a country squire's abode
Secluded Esther. Near at hand
The earl encamped with all his band.
That evening, while a zither played,
He sang a lovelorn serenade,
And watched her gentle face askant
With longing that the fervid chant
Might win the smile he loved to see,
Or win her heart, if that could be.
But Esther thought it worldly song,
And doubted sore of doing wrong
In hearing such a lightsome strain
With any feeling but of pain.
And when he pleaded she would sing,
She made the roomy mansion ring
With solemn airs and pious lays,
The psalmodies of olden days
When captive Hebrews choired beside
Euphrates and the Kebar's tide.
It made him wondrous sad to hear
Such melodies from one so dear.

How should his spirit ever win
Such altitudes, so clear of sin!
How could her holy soul descend
To know him, even as a friend!
Anear they sat, yet far apart—
A mighty gulf 'twixt heart and heart—
So passed in vain the lovelorn day,
As lovelorn lives have passed away.

XVI

Not every earthly sight can be
So clear as sights behind the eye;
Not every mortal man doth see
If this be true, or that a lie.
I think each human doth create
No little of this world of dole,
And shapes his daily life and state
Accordant with his fateful soul.
One meeteth ghouls and sheeted ghosts
And witches foul and murky sprites;
Another meeteth saintly hosts
And angel wings and Eden lights.
One findeth only bitter strife
And corpses stark and weapons bare;
Another, naught but peaceful life
And gladsome creatures everywhere.
So burly Downing, born for war,
And nursed on battle's smoke and flame,
Found earth a very different star
From her who bore his honored name.

No matter whither fared his girl,
She quickly won, as told above,
Some worshipper, perhaps an earl,
Who longed to save and serve and love;
While he, the hero, hero-like,
Met hazards numberless and dire,
Forever pushed to draw and strike
Through men and demons, blood and fire.
And now, yet panting from the broil
With Salem's wizard crew, he spurred
To save his threatened home, and moil
The British ranks and Tory herd.
The odds were huge, the peril light:
A coming nation nerved his arm:
A prototype of might and right
May front a host without alarm.

XVII

But nearing home, our Romus found
The village still above the ground,
And heard from many a rustic scout
How Albion's troop had faced about,
And also how his gracious child
Had fared to meet him through the wild,
And vanished, none could settle where,
Though many sought her trail with care.
Thereon he bade them seek again,
And hied away with flowing rein
To hunt the Lion's scarlet files
From solid land to Brandon's Isles.

Good lack! how many snares bestrowed
His way, whichever way he rode!
For warriors trained in weird deceit
Protected England's slow retreat
With stratagems of forest guile
That made each furlong twice a mile.
At last, so weary grew the track,
He fell asleep upon his hack,
And jolted on with knightly snore,
As though a trumpet blew before,
Till Satan brought the strangest hap
That ever spoiled a hero's nap.
He had a dream: he felt a jar:
He thought himself a shooting star:
He clutched the mane and hooted, "Who!"—
The world was thirty feet below!

Yes, thirty feet below his boots,
And thirty-five below his hoots,
He spied the path he lately trod,
He spied the shadow-dappled sod,
And caught through tossing leaves a clear
Though hasty glimpse of azure mere;
While overhead (can this be true?)
A score or more of comets flew
And all the demon-stars that hie
Before a fallen skater's eye.
At first he thought a Tory wizard
Had mounted him astride a blizzard
And sent him whirling overland,
A prisoner in Satan's hand,
Who nevermore would deal on earth

A valiant stroke or punch of worth.
But, looking twice, he clearly spied
His nag beneath, himself astride,
And also spied around her chest
A twisted thong of hide undressed,
Which held her with a condor-grip
Suspended from a walnut's tip.

XVIII

Right choleric was Downing then
To think that painted heathen men
Should hoist him with a beastly noose
Like any doltish wolf or moose.
But vainly might he snort and rave
At powwow, sagamore and brave;
He found himself no less in air,
And waltzing like a cultured bear.
So clutching hard the cowhide twist,
He shinned aloft, hand over fist;
Then seized a bough and deftly swung
To earth, from leafy rung to rung.
But how pursue the foe afoot?
Or how desert a faithful brute
Who whinnied from her lofty berth
Her shrill desire to visit earth?
Our Ajax searched for axe or spade;
But finding neither, drew his blade,
And hewed as only heroes hew,
Until he smote the walnut through
And tumbled it with mournful soughs

Athwart the woodland's crowded boughs;
Thus landing Dobbin, still alive,
But scarcely fit to ride or drive.
In vain he heartened her to rise.
She lay at length with filmy eyes
And trembling legs and heaving chest,
A creature sorely needing rest;
While Downing sadly watched her throes,
Till presently both fell a-doze,
The courser lying prone, and he
With folded arms against a tree.

XIX

I hold opinion that the sprites
Who fell from Eden's shining heights
Do very rarely slumber well;
And often pace their grievous hell,
Or wander Yaveh's universe,
Bethinking them with zeal perverse
What manner sin to fashion next
Whereby to keep the angels vext;
Or, chancing near a worthy man,
Asleep, or watching ill, they plan
A scurvy scheme to make him gird
At Yankee Doodle's Baldybird.
No doubt it was an imp like this,
A vagrom rogue from burning Dis,
Who tricksily allured, or drove,
A Tory robber through the grove,
And showed him Downing napping there

In sentry o'er his napping mare.
Right well the skulking skinner knew
The paladin of Freedom's crew
Whose mighty arm had brought to scorn
The Lion and the Unicorn.
So, riving sundry withes of wood,
He bound the hero where he stood,
Upright, but slumbering as sound
As any sleeper underground.
This done, he stirred his rascal shanks
To overtake the scarlet ranks,
And bade their chieftain wheel his men
To crush Columbia there and then.

XX

Erelong the sleeper woke refreshed,
To find himself securely meshed,
And see before his wondering eyes
A painted brave of matchless size:
A redskin tramp who chanced that way—
No matter whence—from far a-gley—
And, finding Shiloh's pinioned son,
Had halted for some Mingo fun:
A murderous tramp who brandished slow
A tomahawk in act to throw,
And had a leering, cruel grin
Between his vulture beak and chin.
But deadly dark as seemed the case,
The archetype of Yankee race
Disdained to utter prayer or cry,

And faced his foeman eye to eye
With such a haughty Marian look
That even Indian muscles shook,
And all askant the hatchet flew,
And merely shored a withe in two.
Instanter stalwart Downing broke
The rest asunder at a stroke;
Then seized his gun with hunter sleight
And dared the scalping Pict to fight.
Now came a battle like to those
Of Argive palms and Ilian woes,
When heroes poured a noble flood
Of eloquence o'er fields of blood,
And magnified their godlike skill
And haught ability to kill,
Before they drew their brazen blades
And banged each other through the shades.

XXI

"An fust the creetur cussed my vitals,"
We read in Downing's dialect,
"An' give me forty ugly titles,
As near as I can recollect.
He called me squaw an' yankee doodle,
He called me old an' deaf an' blind,
He called me fox an' hare an' poodle,
With other names that skip my mind.
He swore to have my yaller scallop,
An' pitch my bones to bears an' hounds,
He swore to make my sperrit gallop

About Manitto's hunting-grounds.
An' all the time he kep' a' prancin
Around me, through the underscrub,
An' rooted brush, an' sent it dancin'
An grinned the bark off many a shrub,
But purty soon he turned his noddle
With scootin' round so awful prest,
An' got so tired he couldn't waddle,
An had to squat an' ketch a rest.

"Thereon I took my turn at banter
An' braggin' how I meant to slay.
I circled 'round him on a canter,
An' made the breshwood fly like hay.
I sent some hefty bowlders spinnin
About the woods, like skippin' fleas;
I fairly beat the coot at grinnin',
An' scaled the bark off timber trees.
Of course I didn't disappint him
For ugly names an' slander words,
An' furthermore I 'greed to jint him,
An' fling his scraps to beasts an' birds.
I wasn't more than half in arnest,
I never shone in makin' b'lieve;
An' when I tried to scowl my starnest
I nearly sniggered in my sleeve.
At last I thought I'd done my duty,
An' played the Mingo long enough;
An' so I told my copper beauty
To show his liveliest fightin' stuff.

XXII

"He bounded forrard, feathers wavin',
An' fetched a yell an' clinched his bow.
He bent it like it was a shavin',
Though stiffer than a walnut hoe.
He pinted up an' belched a holler,
An' then he pinted at the ground;
He got the string behint his collar,
An' nearly hauled himself around.

"At last he let the arrer whistle
(A hickry arrer tipped with stun);
I tell ye, cost me all my gristle
To stop it with my duckin-gun.
It traveled like a rifle bullet,
An' give my lock an awful clip.
The trigger stuck; I couldn't pull it
No more than pull a loaded ship.
I had to scratch around for tinder,
An' strike a light to make her hoot,
But knocked the sachem's bow to flinder
Afore he got another shoot.

"Bymebye we quit our distant scrimmage
An' sidled up for neighbor talk.
I used my sword to spile his image;
He slashed at mine with tomahawk.
I found the creetur warn't a pigmy,
An' had to wrastle like a bear,
Because he scuffled smart to dig me
An' reely meant to have my hair.
We fit like bumblebees in clover,

Fust one atop an' then the other;
But purty soon the fuss was over,
An' Downing shet of Injun brother.
I couldn't say jest how it ended,
An' misremember where I clipt;
But there the Mingo lay extended,
The biggest man I ever whipt."

XXIII

The battle scarce had gotten end
Ere Downing saw a thicket bend
A dozen rods away, and saw
Emerge therefrom a youthful squaw,
A gliding, crouching shape, with meek
And timid gaze and wasted cheek,
And garments travelworn, as though
She came in vigil, stint and woe
Through many days of rain or sun
To find and warn a well-loved one.
This haggard daughter of the wild
Bore on her weary back a child,
And ever, while she stooped along,
She chanted low a forest song,
Nor knew that bloody death was here,
Nor spied the foeman lurking near,
But hasted on to hinder fate,
Unwitting that she came too late.

XXIV

But when she saw the fallen chief
She lifted such a keen of grief
That he who harkened there would fain
Have suffered any grievous pain
Rather than hear such wail again.
Next, checking suddenly her moan,
She stooped to search if life were flown;
Then turned her eyes from left to right
To find the victor of the fight.
She fixed him with a settled stare,
A stony gaze of stark despair;
But not another cry was heard,
No mourning nor beseeching word.
She only raised a shaking hand
And pointed to the stranger's brand;
Then drew a finger 'cross her throat,
And made a sign as though she smote;
Submissive, mute, before her foe
And craving death to end her woe.
Our hero gazed, right sore amazed
To see this sylvan creature crazed,
And find that he had thrust the dart
Of battle through a woman's heart.
He held himself a hardened soul,
Inured to warfare's bloody dole;
But all at once he felt a meek
Compassion stealing down his cheek.
He turned away in wild remorse;
Without a word he mounted horse;

He fled the living and the dead;
Without a backward glance he fled;
He fled as fast as he could flee,
In horror of his victory.

XXV

But men must work though women greet,
And surely war is labor meet
For brawny heroes fit to save
Their native land from gyve and glaive.
Our chief felt higher duties draw
Than comforting a widowed squaw;
He had a valiant foe to smite,
A vanished child to bring to light.
So, wheeling wide through leafy lands,
He overpassed the scarlet bands,
Nor halted till he saw, before,
The dunes of Narragansett shore,
And, far behind, the alien hive
He meant to slay or take alive.
This done, he scoured the lanskip round
To find a friendly battle-ground,
And, searching wisely, reached a place
Where Britain's ranks would end their race,
If martial lore or Yankee trick
Could make them charge at double-quick.
Anon the red battalions spied
This lonely horseman riding wide,
And, doubting rustic ambuscade,
Deployed their mass in grim parade,

But there remained, a torpid swarm,
Nor dared begin the battle's storm,
Because their chief had faced about
And sped a-rear on secret scout.

XXVI

"I thought," our Yankee Caesar writ,
"They didn't mean to come to battle;
An' so I slunk ahead a bit
To shake 'em up an' make 'em rattle.
Besides, I had my ambush sot,
An' couldn't let the joke miscarry,
Because I thought as like as not
'Twould send 'em all to Ancient Harry.

"I took a canter down the van,
An' squinted 'round, an' looked 'em over.
The grenadiers were spick-an-span
In uniforms as fresh as clover;
With streaks of powder down the locks
An' queues a-sawin' crost the collar,
An' eyes a-pop because their stocks
Were tighter than would let 'em swaller;
All standin' stiff at shoulder-whoop,
Their eyes a-front an' toes a-kimber,
Without a slouch in all the troop,
A solid lot of fightin' timber.
The tories filled the hinder rows,
A helter-skelter lot of skinners,
Exactly fit to frighten crows,
Or plunder pickaninnies' dinners.

"Well purty soon they reckonized
My uniform, or else my figger,
An' looked a leetle mite surprised,
But didn't charge nor pull a trigger.
So thereupon I made a speech,
Though not a talkin' son of thunder;
I told 'em they would never reach
Their port, an' might as well knock under.
I guess it got 'em hoppin' mad;
For officers begun to clatter
Around; an' next the drummers had
A lively hint to start their batter.

XXVII

"Then came a roar of British cheers,
Half spiled by Tory yelps an' screamin',
An' then the British grenadiers,
Full trot, with baggonets a-gleamin.
Of course I let 'em seem to beat
At first, to make 'em spry an' bolder,
An' sorter fetched a sham retreat,
Jest keepin' watch acrost my shoulder.
I tell ye 'twas a splendid sight
To see the Johnny Bulls a-comin',
Their ranks in line, their muskets bright,
Their chubby faces full of fight,
Their colors flyin', drummers drummin'.
At last I reached the very spot
Whereon I'd figured out to flail 'em,
They still a-chargin', pipin' hot,
An' bawlin' like the ass of Baalam.

"There was a slantin pressapace
Ten times as high as Shiloh steeple,
With zigzag steps adown the face,
Dug out, I spose, by neighbor people.
I jumped the humpty dumpty brink,
An' bumpety-bumpt from top to bottom,
A-laughin' all the way to think
How sure an' sartinly I'd got 'em.
An' so I had; adown the cliff
They fluttered after their bellwether,
Hell-bent, but sojer-like an stiff,
With gaiters swingin' all together.
Of course they perished there an' then,
The very thing on which I reckoned;
I jedge about two thousen' men
Were smashed to jell in half a second.
It was the most decisive squabble
I ever finished single-handed;
It made the British army hobble
From Newport Island, half disbanded."

XXVIII

If any wight thus far believes
The marvels writ in Downing's leaves,
I hold his credence will not fail
For what remaineth of the tale,
Although it soundeth wondrous like
The yarns a tarry marlinspike
Unfolds to open-mouthed marines
Or younkers fresh from harvest scenes.

You all remember how the earl
Who loved our gracious Yankee girl
Had tidings from a Tory hound
Of Downing fast asleep and bound.
By Magog! what a thrill of joy
Bestirred this knightly-minded boy!
He saw a glorious chance to bring
Unmeasured good to land and king,
And win perchance.—But who could tell
If man might win such damozel?
So, bidding Esther, Fare-you-well,
He rode with all his trooper race
To save her sire from evil case
And earn for both the royal grace.

XXIX

Through woodland wide the lover hied
As merrily as man may ride,
And reached in middle afternoon
The spot where Downing rivalled Boone;
But only found a bloody brave,
A squaw who delved a warrior's grave,
An infant giggling 'neath the copse
And broken bonds and shattered hopes.
Then, grieving o'er his fruitless quest,
He scouted leafy vale and crest
Till evening poured her dusky files
Through silent glades and rustling aisles,
And filled the wold with cheating shades,
The paths with seeming ambuscades.

At last he knew his errand vain,
And, turning rein, he sought amain
His captive maid and footmen train.
But where were they, and where was he?
He reached the spot where they should be;
He reached it many times that night;
Then sought anew till morning light,
A sore bewildered, woful wight;
For every now and then there came
Athwart the gloom a spit of flame,
And then he heard a hissing ball,
A dying groan, a heavy fall;
And so his troopers one by one
Fell out until he rode alone.
Ah! horrible it was to hear
Death treading on his steps so near,
Nor ever win the piteous grace
To front the monster's savage face,
And fall as gallant men desire
With bloody sabre glinting fire.
Ah! horrible to feel at last
The cruel bullet driven fast
Through palpitating flesh and thought,
And conscious life return to naught.

XXX

The morning wrestled with the moon
Before he wakened from his swoon,
And thought it slumber, but again
Remembered all his troopers slain,

And found his breath a feeble sigh,
And knew himself anear to die.
A moment's prayer; again he drowsed,
Or fainted; but anon he roused
Because a shadow veiled the skies;
And, lifting up his glassy eyes,
He saw a giant-moulded man,
Of rustic visage dark with tan,
Attired in careless martial gear,
Who knelt and murmured words of cheer.
He knew the bony face and frame;
He knew the man; he called his name.
He whispered low with painful breath
His love, triumphant over death.
He sighed, "I saved her; is she dead?"
And hearing, "No," was comforted.
Then came a change upon his face,
A thankful, gladdened, yearning grace,
A look that told of saintly sights
Suddenly seen through morning's lights.
So, gripping fast the foeman's palm,
As though he found its touch a balm,
He died, forgiving, loving, meek,
With Downing's tears upon his cheek.

XXXI

They folded him in Shiloh earth,
Not many steps from Downing's hearth.
Yet never might the father tell
His gentle child how passing well

That stranger loved her during life,
Nor who had smitten him in strife.
So, often did the maid recall
The lowly knoll and grassy pall,
And glide within the churchyard gate
To gaze thereon compassionate,
Yet never knew she stood above
A heart that gave her all its love,
And never heard those pulses stir
That beat for her and ceased for her.

THE ENCHANTED VOYAGE

IV

THE ENCHANTED VOYAGE

I

Hurrah for Downing! He had done
Such doughty deeds that Freedom's sun
Had often paused in middle sky
To hear his fearful charging cry,
And rushed through many a sleepless night
To see the morn's appointed fight.
Alone our rustic Joshua fought,
Yet such deliverance had wrought
That all New England's sacred coasts
Were clear of Tories, save as ghosts,
While Britons, Hessians, Mingos, witches
Had fled, or filled their final ditches.
In short, the Downeast land was freed
From tyrant's breed and Tophet's creed;
And every Yankee man might raise
His garden-sauce and hymns of praise,
Nor fear lest Tories, sly as moles,
Should hack his independence poles:
Lest purchased bravos, foreign-born,
Should cut his throat and purse and corn;
Lest wizard pinches, pricks and beatings
Should interrupt his evening meetings.

II

But Downing might not cease his labor,
Nor even wipe his bloody sabre
While foeman trampled any tittle
Of earth where humans guess and whittle.
How could he think of crops and cattle,
How think of anything but battle,
While demon-fleets in weird processions
Imported hordes of Belial's Hessians
To captivate and slay his fellows
Beyond the Hudson's crystal billows,
Or sleep their beery sleep and fatten
Upon the sacred isle, Manhattan?
Thus roused to fury, Downing thundered
Such words that even Shiloh wondered,
And feared lest toils too elephantic
Had driven the Yankee Sampson frantic.
"I'll build," he roared with indignation,
"A fleet to save our chosen nation;
I'll cruise about the briny surges
In spite of Guildhall's demiurges;*
I'll harry all the tarnal regions
That breed the sassage-eating legions,
And drive Apollyon's self to wrestle
Like mad to save his Hesse Cassel."

III

So, grinding axe and chisel bright,
And felling trees o'er hill and dale,

*Gog and Magog.

He joinered out with Yankee sleight
A squadron of a single sail
About as terrible to meet
As Jefferson's mosquito fleet.
But like ingenious Crusoe, he
Forgot that seamen need the sea,
And built his ocean-scourge at home,
A score of miles from ocean's foam,
Where certainly she never struck
Her flag to foeman's better luck,
But also never shone in fray,
Nor ever made a knot a day;
For even clippers cannot travel
A sheet of cobblestone and gravel.
But genius finds all things a school,
And learns from errors how to rule.
Our skipper's purpose faltered not
Because he failed to sail a lot.
He saw that he must seek the main,
Or launch his navies all in vain;
That nothing short of ocean's roar
Would answer for a commodore.
Instructed thus, he climbed astride
His horse, as country vikings ride,
And journeyed south a summer day,
Enquiring all the drouthy way
If any seaport, wharf or pier
Existed near the vasty mere,
And also where a Whiggish grip
Might clapperclaw a Tory ship.

IV

At last he spied a glorious sight,
The blue Atlantic, jeweled bright
With countless ripples, shining keen
As facets graved in tourmaline;
And just below the bowldered hill
Whereon he paused to gaze his fill,
He found the very thing he lacked
To be an ocean god in fact.

Beside the drowsy, nodding sedge
That rimmed a tiny haven's edge,
Where baby billows romped and laughed
As though their feather-heads were daft,
He found a jaunty coasting craft,
(At anchor, though with canvas spread,)
Which had a mast and figure-head
And boom and rudder, like the one
Himself had built a month agone;
Whereat he thanked the kindly skies
And claimed the sloop as lawful prize.

Some thieving tories lurked aboard
Who promptly died by Freedom's sword,
For vagabonds of traitor kind
Were not a whit to Downing's mind,
And rarely fled his noble hate
Withouten loss of limb or pate,
As crabs escape from mortal rout
Because their legs and tails pull out.

The skirmish done, the pirates slain,
Our chieftain snapped the anchor chain

And turned without a change of face
To challenge Fortune's weird embrace.
He turned his back on natal shore
And all the life he lived before.
Alone he dared the protean sea;
Alone, yet confident that he
Would surely reach the other beach
And spoil the men of Teuton speech,
And make their Thor and Odin flee.

V

But eftersoon, beneath his feet,
He heard a sharp refrain of greet,
And then he thought the plaining tone
Was like his darling Esther's own,
The voice to him of sweetest sound
In all our fallen planet's round.
He leaped below; he found her there
Begirt with many a link and snare,
So bound by that piratic crew
Whose blood besmirched the rearward blue.
He snapped her bonds like brittle glass,
Or tender withes of summer grass,
And might have bursted them the same,
No matter what their stuff and frame;
For wondrous wight was he in might
As any giant fame can cite,
Far huskier than men we raise
In these degenerate, mawkish days
When philanthropic frenzy saves

Unworthy types from clement graves,
And holds in mischievous subjection
The law of natural selection.

VI

A thrilling tale the daughter told,
Right strange to folk of modern mould,
Though like adventures often came
To gracious maids of Grecian name,
To Andromeda by the shore,
To Proserpine and many more.
She walked at eve a lonely wood,
Reciting hymns in dreamy mood,
And watching rapt the boreal lights
That filled the hollow sky with flights
Of saintly ghosts in bright attire,
Ascending swift on wings of fire;
When all at once the glory died
And shudders through the forest sighed,
And crickets hushed their cheery shout,
And fireflies put their lanterns out,
As though a mighty fiend drew near
Who draped effulgent night in fear.
Then overhead the branches clove,
And through the trembling shadows drove
A sombre form without a form,
No doubt a wraith of night and storm,
Who lifted her on gloomy plumes
Athwart the evening's ghostly brumes
O'er glinting lake and woodland brown

And frowning crag and glimmering town,
To leave her captivate with those
Who lately fell by Downing's blows.
Which tale her father never doubted,
Because, although his arm had routed
The wizard hordes and goblin legions
In manifold New England regions,
He knew a fiendish remnant scouted
From point to point as Satan's skinners
To plague the saints and help the sinners.

VII

Rejoiced to meet his child again
And break anew Apollyon's chain,
Our commodore pursued his cruise
And found no little to amuse
A Yankee fond of information
Who loved to study all creation.
Around him, thick and tame as sheep,
Appeared the wonders of the deep;
Sea-serpents two miles long, or more,
(For Downing often called it four),
Reefs overrun with ocean maids
(Who sang, of course, and twined their braids),
Leviathans, behemoths, whales,
And bugling tritons dressed in scales;
While, far aloft, flew deadlier forms,
Foreboding wrack of wheeling storms;
For now a wizard, now a wraith,
(If Downing's tale deserves our faith)

Shot swiftly o'er the frighted seas
With angry hum like bumblebees,
The messengers of George's rage
To Arnold, Clinton, Howe and Gage.
Alas that Downing failed to smite
These caitiffs in their eldritch flight,
For, peering through their skinny claws,
They spied the Thor of freedom's cause
And guessed aright his daring plan
To martellate the Hessian clan.
So, spurring goat and cat and broom,
They bustled on through sheen and gloom
To Arnold, famed and mighty traitor,
Their evil commonwealth's dictator,
And brought him word of Downing's antic
Attempt to cross the fierce Atlantic.

VIII

As awful lords of Gaza jeered
And winked the eye and wagged the beard,
When Sampson stood within their fane,
His tresses shorn, his valor vain,
So Arnold scoffed in wicked sport
To hear the warlock crew's report,
Because he thought New England's knight
Had surely fought his final fight.
But Arnold was a soul of power
Who might not waste a golden hour
In counting chickens yet unhatched,
Or scalping foemen not despatched.

At once he launched his wizard swarm
To seek the dervish fiends of storm,
And bid them maul that daring yawl
With crashing wave and hissing squall.
Eftsoon the ocean imps collected
And wrought as Arnold's trolls directed,
On windy circles fiercely wheeling,
Forever tow'rd the centre stealing,
Arousing, lifting, driving ocean
In clashing bursts of mad commotion,
A screaming whirl of monstrous revels,
The cyclone-dance, the dance of devils.

IX

It was as though a second birth
Of demonkind had come on earth,
Such mongrel, goblin clamors rose,
Such roar of ragings, wail of woes:
Insane blasphemings, madder prayers;
Infernal paeans, fierce despairs;
Derisive laughters, bacchant yells:
Exultings of triumphant hells;
Defiances of crests to crests;
Appeals for mercy, hoarse behests:
Laments of monstrous agonies;
Huzzas of vast debaucheries;
Refrains that ever seemed to weep;
Responsive snarls of Titan sleep;
Mad dialogues of surge with surge,
Half heard athwart a booming dirge;

Extatic bellows from abysses,
Commixed with groaning; snaky hisses;
Discordant babblings; senseless bleats
Of griffins; hoots of crazed afreets;
Mysterious sentences, half spoken;
Weird oracles in accents broken;
A Cosmos shouting without thought;
Replies of Chaos, meaning naught;
The brutish language of the great
Sea-furies inarticulate;
The strivings of the Deep to reach
Some anthropoid, or devilish speech.

X

But, wild as that alarum was,
The sight surpassed; without a pause
The tempest-imps tore ocean's face
To flying tatters frail as lace;
Like hounds they leaped upon their prey
And scattered it in clots of spray.
The billows reeled before their wrath;
The surges cringed; the cyclone's path
Was over dinted helms of waves
That stooped away like beaten slaves;
It hurled them tumbling, groveling, prone;
It trampled them; it reigned alone.
The ocean's visage altered; spells,
Mutations, marvels, miracles
Succeeded swift; at every glance
It changed its awful countenance.
No breaker wallowed there but bore

Marmorean streaks and dapplings hoar,
With whirlpools twirling up and down
From yeasty base to feathery crown;
While fierce explosions, far below,
Uplifted floods of indigo,
One moment glassy, dark and cool
As any forest-bowered pool;
Then swiftly folded, wrinkled, curled,
And gone forever from the world.
But mainly all was sheeted white.
The azure quailed; a dazzling flight
And flood of lather oversloughed
The billows with a ghastly shroud;
And underneath the pallor rolled
Insensate monsters manifold;
Though, scarcely dead, they rose apace
And trampled out their breathless race.
Anear, or yonder, drove serene,
Resplendant slopes of crystal green,
That seemed as hard as mountain-pent,
But ere another glance were rent
To utter froth, and then again
Arose and speeded o'er the main.
Tiara'd breakers glinted by,
Like charging Titans; then a cry,
A snarling, hissing, strangled breath
Of agony, announced their death.
But ere they vanished, others stood
Above them; that Antaean brood
Renewed from every fall the strife;
A ceaseless death fed ceaseless life.

XI

Man seemed an atom here. His power
To nothing turned in ocean's hour
Of wrath and rule. That slender bark,
Of late so like a skimming lark,
Was soon a mastless, drifting wreck
And barely showed its writhing deck
Above the flaked and sheeted spume,
That flashed like Death's eternal plume.
It struggled not; its strength was done;
It had the fainting lurch of one
Who reels through lines of smiting foes
Half conscious of their jeers and blows.
The billows, watchful, swift of spring,
Pursued with hate this helpless thing,
Attending it as painted braves
Hunt bleeding prisoners to graves.
Titanic sea-gods jostled it;
Demonic, scoffing muzzles spit
Against it ere they hurtled past;
Unshapely, wallowing monsters massed
Their quivering bulks to overturn;
Above the prow, above the stern,
Chimaeras, dropping clots of foam
Gnashed threat'nings; watery imp and gnome
Waved hatred while they struggled by
From hither to the further sky;
In all the reeling, howling flight
No pity sounded; naught but spite.

XII

So morning went, and afternoon,
And night withouten star or moon;
So likewise all the morrow passed,
'Mid hissing spray and screaming blast.
But when a second sunset fired
Its western altar, greatly tired
The wind-enchanters seemed to be,
And smoothness slid along the sea,
The rushing, rocking, toppling peaks,
The watery snarls, the windy shrieks,
The cyclop anarchy of ocean
Subsided, failed in voice and motion,
Till mellow twilight's dwindling bounds
Revealed but rounded azure mounds,
Atlantic prairies rolling wide
Their gleamy downs through eventide.
And now our castaways might sleep,
As men have slumbered on the deep
Who knew not whether morning's light
Awaited them, or endless night.
They slept, but not without a word
Of prayer from Esther; was it heard?
Perchance, for when she oped her eyes
She lived and saw the blessed skies.
The night had vanished; morning shone;
Her father lived; she heard his tone,
And marveled why he talked alone.
Again she would have drowsed away,
But presently she heard him say,

Disjointed words of marveling,
As one who spies a wondrous thing.
In Yankee dialect he spake,
And thus she heard him, half awake.
"Am I alive, or dead as Cyrus?
Is that a ship of ancient Tyrus?
Or have the Hindoos took a notion
To scoot in temples round the ocean?"

XIII

She leaped a-foot; she reached his side;
She glanced along the kindling tide;
And there, beneath the gracious dawn
That draped the east with rosy lawn,
She saw a weirder spectacle
Than ever wizard wrought by spell.
Did necromancy rule the deep?
Had cycles vanished with her sleep?
Had future centuries arisen,
Or aeons dead escaped their prison?
Was time a chaos? Were the ages
Commixed like haply gathered pages?
A furlong off, beneath the lea,
Slow-heaving o'er the heaving sea,
Advanced beneath the orient blaze
A galleon of ancient days;
A vessel such as Holland hands
Outfitted when Columbian lands
Were leafy wilds where beasts and men
Held daily strife for food and den;

A craft like those ye now behold
In tapestries bedimmed with mould,
Or tomes that tell of customs dead,
Or vagrom dreams of painter's head.
Yet, while so fabulous in guise,
She lumbered there to mortal eyes
As real a ship as ever tacked,
A solid bulk, an oaken fact.

XIV

Yea more; she seemed a ship of might;
Her tops were turrets, pierced for fight;
Her stem and stern like castles towered;
Along her bulwark cannon lowered;
While cutlass, pike and arquebuse
Were ranged amidst for boarding use.
Her folk were many; all along
The forward railing leaned a throng
Of mariners; and others bowed
From dizzy top and yard and shroud;
All gazing gravely on the wreck
With settled face and craning neck,
The stoniest crew of men that e'er
Did stare athwart an earthly mere.
And every speechless gazer bore
Such garb as Holland used of yore;
Broad-leaféd hats with pointed peaks,
High-colored doublets, ample breeks,
With shoulder-piece, or morion,
Or breastplate glinting back the sun;

All quaint as maskers at a ball,
Or mummers ruffed for carnival,
Or waxen mannikins that show
The raimentings of long ago.
Yet these were but a common brood.
Upon the quarter-castle stood
A group of three, in velvet clad,
Who nodded ostrich plumes, and had
A noble port of haught command,
Like lordly men of knightly land.
Of these the tallest lifted head,
And skyward gazed as though he said
A word of thankfulness or prayer;
Then, turning tow'rd our Yankee pair,
Extended hand, and mutely gave
Assurance that he came to save.

XV

Thereon did puzzled Downing stammer
His wonderment in Shiloh grammar.
"May I be tomahawked," he blurted,
"If Satan's kingdom aint converted!
I've offen heerd of hell a-floatin',
An' didn't bleeve in no sich boatin';
But here it comes as plain as blazes,
A-sayin' prayers an' singin' praises.
For either Downing's lost his reason,
An' needs confinement for a season,
Or we behold that fiendish notion,
The Flyin' Dutchman—plague of ocean—

Who allays keeps a-sailin'-sailin',
To pick the puss of trade an' whalin.
"But now, it seems, his will an' inwards
Incline no longer, hell-an-sinwards,
If one can jedge a feller's goin'
By pleasant ways an' pious showin'.
So let us hope the spangled creetur
Will pitch his hymn to shortish metre
An' launch his wherry hurry-scurry
To snake us out of wet an' worry.
If not, I doubt his whole profession
An' count him nawthin' but a Hessian,
For gospel talk withouten kindness
Is ruther wuss than pagan blindness
An' fetches neither scrapes nor thankys
From native-born, enlightened Yankees."

XVI

Erelong a jollyboat was lowered
Beneath the stranger's quarterboard,
A portly craft of heavy jowl,
Exceeding like the famous bowl
Wherein the trustful Gotham sages
Went grandly down to future ages.
Next Downing spied four sailors glide
Aslant the galleon's bellied side,
And after them the lordly chief
Who lately signalled him relief;
Then saw them feather oars and urge
Their rolling shallop o'er the surge

Until it smote his sunken rail,
No ghostly bark of vapors pale,
But stiff with oak and clinker mail.
No phantoms, either, were the rowers,
But stalwart as their ashen oars;
And he who bore the ostrich plume
Had surely never known the tomb;
For, leaping to the wreck, he strode
With sounding steps in mortal mode.
A man he was, in blood and bone;
A very man, right nobly grown;
His visage flushed with younker health;
His glances azure; while a wealth
Of curling sunshine overhung
His ivory brow and signed him young.

XVII

A man he truly seemed; and yet
Some awful variance was set
Betwixt this man and other men,
The gladsome folk we daily ken.
You might have fancied him a soul
From distant stellar realms of dole
Who never happed before on earth,
Nor heard of Bethlem's wondrous birth;
For utter sorrow brimmed his eyes
And choked his breath with many sighs,
As though he knew the wrath to come,
But knew not how to fly therefrom.

Moreover, man is rarely seen
So strangely meek in act and mien;
For, baring solemnly his head,
He knelt and humbly pressed his red
And comely mouth against the deck;
And many times he kissed the wreck
With choking sobs and whisperings
Of incommunicable things;
As one who, chancing on the spot,
Where erst he aimed a mortal shot,
May kneel above the hidden corse
In sudden pang of hot remorse,
And swear repentance there of crime
And holier life for coming time.
At last he rose with calmer face,
As though a messenger of grace
Had swiftly flown from mercy's throne
With pardoning answer to his moan.
Then, turning tow'rd our castaways,
Who stared the while in dumb amaze,
He bent his lips to Esther's wrist,
Then likewise kist her father's fist,
The meekest wight that ever laid
A kiss on hand of man or maid.

XVIII

Such courtesy did much surprise
A Downing reared in rustic guise.
He never saw the like before,
Nor heard thereof in days of yore.

So, partly awed, yet more perplexed
And ill at ease, and therefore vexed,
He glumly said, "My christian brother,
Your meaning's dark, an' seems to me
We'd sooner understand each other
If we should let the bussing be.
Dessay there's fun in scrapes an' kisses
To them that's broughten up to pass
Their extry hours, like city misses,
A-smirkin 'fore a lookin-glass.
But Goodness didn't light our tapers
In deestricks given to monkey-capers,
An' we admire these fancy manners
As much as Satan does hosanners.
"So, waivin' furder bows an' curchies,
Explain with no uncertain sound
Whether your ark a fort or church is
An' what you mean by droppin' round.
But while you're thinkin' up your answer
I'll briefly state that I'm a man, sir,
Disposed to be almighty tender
About the p'int of no-surrender."

XIX

The stranger started, not in spite,
But marvel mixed with sharp delight,
Like one who wins a pard'ning word
Instead of mortal thrust incurred.
Then, taking Downing's hand, he said,
"I trow that thou art English bred.

Thank God that I may hear agen
The blessid speech of living men!
Thank God that men without a curse
May welcome me, so long perverse,
The slave of sin for many a year,
The haunting fiend of many a mere!"
  This utterance of gladness rung
In syllables of English tongue,
But English other than we know,
A mother-speech of yore-ago.
The tones were sweet. But strangely old
They seemed, as though the funeral mould
Of centuries had gathered round
The words. They had a ghostly sound
That brought to mind the eldritch lay
And requiem of ivies gray,
Lamenting o'er a riven keep
Whose knights are dust, whose bugles sleep.
  At first the sense was dimly marked;
But presently, as Downing harked
And fiercely strove to comprehend,
He saw a beam of meaning wend
Its way along the words; and soon
The purport sparkled clear as noon;
Although the wight who understood
Deemed it patter of alien brood;
Nor guessed that thus his fathers spake,
Nor quite believed himself awake.
  As one can hear discourse in sleep
That moveth him to curse and weep,
Yet cannot answer, though he sighs

And grimaces to mouth replies,
So Downing heard his fearful guest
With palsied tongue and heaving breast;
And when the Flying Dutchman bade
Our Yankees follow, they obeyed
And eftersoon set foot upon
That ever-cruising galleon,
The weirdest visit, I opine,
That ever was on turf or brine.

XX

Our chief, in column after column
Of what he calls his Seckont Vollum,
Relates such brags anent this galley
That skeptic spirits dare to rally
The wonder-tale as merely fable,
A crumb purloined from Arthur's Table.
But Downing's self and Downing's labors
Are testified by trusty neighbors,
By men who sate in deacon's places,
Distinguished for their gifts and graces,
Their scholarship in orthodoxies
And zeal with contribution boxes;
And we, who take their witness kindly,
Believe his blague and quote it blindly.
"She was," he writes, "the queerest notion
That ever wabbled round the ocean;
The awkardest sea-goin' creetur
Sence Pharaoh an' Simon Peter.
The stern an' fokesle histed uppards

Consid'able like mons'ous cuppards,
In consequence of which her figger
Was like a crescent moon, though bigger.
She kerried every kind of wep'm
That Granther Noah took as kep'm,
From Tubal Cain's harpoons an' hammers
To muskets made by Amsterdammers,
With cannons built of wroughten metal
No thicker than a potash kettle,
A sight more suitable for bustin'
Than givin enemies a dustin'."

XXI

"But sartinly the strangest show
Aboard was officers an' sailors,
A gang of younkers all aglow,
But dressed by dead an' buried tailors.
They had a far-off, hopeful gaze,
Reminding me of Eden's glory,
Or, ruther more, of pious ways
That lead to Heaven's upper story;
Besides, they had a gentle sadness,
A-glimpsin' through a trustin' gladness,
A gleam of meek an' patient graces
We offen see on corpses' faces;
By which, though not a holy liver,
I found it easy to diskiver
The creeturs were in great affliction
An' labored under deep conviction,
Yet entertained a hope to die on
The steep an' narrow road to Zion.

"Well, trompin' on the skipper's shadder,
We ambled down the cabin ladder
An' found a gorgis-lookin' chimber,
All carpentered in whittled timber,
A dozen paces square by measure
An' bilin' over full of treasure;
For instance, cuppards, chists an' tables
Of ivory an' fragrant lumbers,
As fine as dreams in schoolboy slumbers,
Or what we hear about in fables;
With trinkets thick as Jews in Numbers,—
Tyaries, bracelets, silver flagons,
Gold-mounted gods an' jeweled dragons.

XXII

"An' right among the raree-shows,
Two youngling men an' one young woman,
(Arrayed in go-to-meetin' close),
So hansome they were skussly human;
The Flyin' Dutchman's near relations,
Who shooken hands an' offered cheers
With such a buzz of salutations
As ruther stumped our Yankee ears.
The christenins were Dutch to me,
An' dreffful tough to spell, I reckon.
The skipper interduced; says he,
'My name is Hendrick Vanderdecken;
My cousins are these other two;
The first is Dircksen Vanderdryfe;
The other, Arendt Vanderloo,

And this, Cornelie, is his wifey.'—
Or so I understood the titles,
Although, perhaps, I've missed the spellin';
For Dutch is spoken from the vitals
An' hard to write beyond all tellin.'"

XXIII

Thus Downing found himself the guest
Of ocean's wanderer and pest,
The fated guide of murderous waves,
The haunting ghoul of coraled graves.
High dialogue the strangers held,
As suited men of hoary eld.
Of that ennobled age they spoke
When all Iberia's empire broke
In floods of steel on Holland's shore,
And backward rolled, a flood of gore;
When Orange cheered the slender band
That stood for freedom, faith and land,
And cumbered breach and field and sea
With dead who left their country free;
When martyred cities, clothed in fire,
Saw victory's crown above the pyre;
And vain was Parma's wondrous art,
And vainly burst Don Juan's heart.
For long our hero speechless heard,
With mouth agape like youngling bird,
Debating how such lordly names
And gallant deeds and shining fames
Could be no less unknown to him

Than things beyond creation's brim.
At last he stammered, musing much,
"I reckon those were ancient Dutch;
An' though I'm but a middlin' schollard
In history, I think I know,
For sartin sure, the graveyard swaller'd
Their strength an' glory long ago;
For Holland's sign come down a story
When Britain took to keepin' tavern,*
An' Spain has got as weak an' hoary
As giant Pope in Bunyan's cavern.
So, on the whole an' 'barrin' errors,
I ruther guess those famous coots
Charged bagnets on the king of terrors
An' died, like sojers, in their boots."

XXIV

Then golden-haired Cornelie cried,
"Alas! it may be all have died.
But all? Do all my kinsmen sleep?
The little ones who scarce could creep?
My brother with the flaxen head?
How may it be that all are dead?"
Then Esther, witnessing her grief,
And knowing naught could bring relief,
Inclined her brow and sobbed aloud,
While valiant Downing also bowed
To hide the burning drops that ran

* In New England the place of taverner was formerly held by town authority, and was a position of trust and honor.

Adown his cheek of rugged tan.
For, stalwart though he was, and grim
To hardnesses that touched but him,
He might not spy distress anear
Nor see his daughter shed a tear,
But sympathy would smite him through,
And he would weep, as angels do.
Meanwhile the others held askance
With folded arms and lowered glance,
Unflinching shapes of calm despair,
Without a tear, without a prayer,
As kenning well that no lament
Nor plea would ease their punishment.
But shortly Vanderdecken gave
This comment, "Welcome be the grave!"
Then Vanderloo besought: "My own,
My sweet Cornelie, cease thy moan!
Thy kin have bowed to God's decree;
Long since they crossed the Shining Sea.
Gone are the children, like their games:
Forgot, perchance, their very names.
Yet, dearest one, take heart of grace,
For they will meet us face to face,
Will meet and greet us when our feet
Find rest before the mercy-seat."

XXV

"Yea," Vanderdecken sighed. "We know
The truth, at last. And be it so!"
Then, turning to his guests, he said,
"Two hundred stormy years have sped

About this world of weary wail
Since we loosened the homeward sail;
Yet still we plough a shoreless foam,
And still we cannot find our home.
Ye marvel such a thing can be.
But hearken! listen! hear! and ye
Shall know how God can discipline,
How swift his anger follows sin.
I was distract with love of gold,
And like Iscariot I sold
My peace, my happiness, myself,
My fellow men, my God, for pelf.
I was distract for it because
It makes and shatters human laws;
Because it gives one lordly place
And lordly power among his race;
Because it makes one like a king.
Wherever shone the eldritch thing
I hasted there with deadly sword,
Or deadlier guile, to swell my hoard,
Nor cared though tears and blood bestained
The sheen of every sequin gained.
But oftentimes, from year to year,
Unearthly whispers reached my ear,
Fell tenderly through starlit calms,
Or noontides breathing spice and balms,
Slid weirdly over burnished seas,
Where nothing was, nor ship nor breeze,
So weirdly came, so weirdly fled,
I looked to see the misty dead.
And what the whisper sighed was this:

'Thou sellest thine eternal bliss;
Erelong wilt thou be called again
To choose betwixt thy God and gain;
Then, turning still from ways of worth,
Thy doom shall wonderstrike the earth.'

XXVI

"Yet none the less—O heart of flint!
I gathered gold withouten stint,
Nor paused amid my vampyre chase,
Nor ceased to scorn the heavenly grace,
And like myself I made the men
Who share my fortune now as then.
This galley freighted we with groans
And bloody tears of Indian zones,
Transformed by cruelty and lies
To jewels, gold and merchandise.
Then, hoping greater gain if we
Might quickly overspan the sea,
I swore that neither love, nor fear,
Nor law divine, nor human tear
Should make me slacken sail or veer
In all my voyage. Demon oath!
Fulfilled with more than demon troth,
And punished by the watchful power
Of Him who knows the sparrow's hour.
Upon the hundreth prosperous day
We bellied swift along our way,
Dividing Holland seas at last
And vaunting over perils past;

Upon that gracious day, as morn
Shook over earth her golden horn,
Enriching all the east with skies
That fitter seemed for Paradise;
Upon that gracious morn we spied,
A furlong from our hissing side,
A wreck that wallowed deadly deep,
Whereon a castaway did weep
And wring his hands athwart the wave,
Beseeching us to pause and save.

XXVII

"Cornelie, then, my cousin's wife,
Made intercession for that life
With such a piercing woman-wail
That all who harkened turned a-pale
And stared askant with sullen brow,
And muttered, 'Will he break the vow?'
For every heart was hard with greed
To win the promised gain of speed.
Ah, maddened soul! I said her Nay,
And briskly foamed along my way,
While swifter still that vessel span
And flyted from the sight of man,
Although I know not how it fled,
If underneath or overhead;
For where it span a wondrous light
Of dazzling pinions dimmed the sight,
And when the glory skyward shone
The mere was clear and we alone.

The deed was done, my sin complete,
And vengeance came on speedy feet;
For scarcely could I turn to gaze
Along the prow for landward haze
Before a flying 'larum passed
That cried above our tallest mast:
'Behold, O waves, behold these men,
And hold them till I come agen!'
Then wept Cornelie, 'We are lost,
For that was Jesus tempest-tost,
And thou deniedst him, and we
Are dungeoned in a gateless sea.'
Had any man such omen spoke,
I would have dealt him mortal stroke,
So arrogant was I in mind,
And sudden fierce to humankind.
Yet soothfully had she divined
Our crowning sin and coming woe.
Alas! as often haps below,
The innocent was doomed to share
Sin's punishment and sin's despair.

XXVIII

"The malediction hath not failed,
For, since it larumed, we have sailed—
O Jesus! how we sail thy seas
To win a port that ever flees,
To win the land that gave us birth;
Yea, that or any alien earth!

How often hath our galley spanned
A world where many cities stand;
Where gladsome creatures throng the ways
And thankful belfries call to praise;
Where flowrets bloom and branches swing
And insects hum and birdlets sing;
Where even brutes tread fragrant turf
And lusty shores withstand the surf;
How often round such pleasant world,
How woful often have we whirled,
And found it but a howling nest
Of demon waves that never rest!

All earthly forms, all coastwise shapes,
The haughty cliffs, the prowling capes,
The very mountains huge and hoar
That sentried otherwhiles the shore,
And beckoned us from zone to zone,
Have vanished into graves unknown.
Yea, fiery isles that sunward rolled
Their solemn smokings, fold on fold,
Like giants burning sacrifice
And waving incense tow'rd the skies;
Or, seen through oceanic night,
Now panted breaths of filmy light,
Now held a lurid shaft aloft
Whose chapter reached the starry croft;
These, too, have flyted from their posts
As utterly as shriven ghosts.

The elfin picture-lands that slide
From beetling cliff or mountain side
Deep into gulfs of liquid steel;

And, smiling far below the keel,
Bewitch the sailor with their guiles
Until he sees hesperian isles
Of verdant grove and sunny knoll,
And hears their belfries call his soul;
E'en these enchantments of the deep,
These wizard dreams of ocean's sleep,
We sought with care through many seas,
And found them not—not even these!

XXIX

"No frothing jowl of wolfish main
But we have fronted it in vain.
No shouting surge, no snarling bar,
Will fling the gates of death ajar.
No bloody haunt of pagan men,
No pirate's lair, no monster's den,
Will suffer us to draw anigh,
And hail its cruelty, and die.
No land we meet—no land—no land!
No, not the humblest beach of sand.
No matter how we span its girth,
We cannot find the winsome earth,
Nor aught but ocean's heaving graves,
An endless charnelhouse of waves.
Oh, what a hell the deep may be!
There is no horror like the sea.
Time also vanished, like the shore;
Omniscient Time knew us no more.
We wrote in books the dreary days

Till record stopped in stark amaze.
How might we credit such a thing!
The months advanced on tireless wing;
The years, the lustres, filled their lot;
We reckoned them, believing not.
We numbered, numbered, numbered oft,
Nor yet believed, but rather scoffed;
Denying that our woful breath
Was overdue to cheated death;
Denying that the friends we sought,
The foes we dreaded, all were nought.

XXX

"Another horror! We were doomed
To gaze upon the wrecks that boomed
And signalled vainly for relief.
Wherever tore the ambushed reef,
Wherever gorged the stealthy shark,
Wherever lurched a riven bark,
We hasted, spite of helm and sails,
And endless wrath of heady gales.
No idle prayers, no hopeless sighs,
No last despairs, no bubbling cries,
Of ocean folk beneath the skies,
But there we ride, we ever ben
Beholders curst of living men.
No rest! no calm! Forever bruised
By fronting storms, our galley cruised
Through tropic blaze and polar cold,
Through mighty meres, unguessed of old,

From foaming waste to foaming waste
With headlong, blinding, madding haste,
Only to witness everywhere
Incessant woe and wild despair.

XXXI

"Two hundred years we fared alone.
Two hundred years my heart was stone,
So wicked hard I would not deign
To utter moan, nor even feign
Desire to holpen shipwrecked soul.
But yestereve, outworn with dole,
And yearning once again to walk
About my childhood's home, and talk
With men of hopeful, gladsome heart,
I called my kinsmen here apart,
Bemoaned my sin and prayed for grace
With weeping that from face to face
Ran burning hot and swelled apace
Till even rugged marineers,
Who heard us, melted into tears.
Then once again returned the low
Unearthly sigh of yore-ago,
No longer breathing threat and moan,
But loving sweet in word and tone.
It fell, I thought, from starry choirs,
And yet it frighted not the ear;
It had a sound of golden lyres,
And yet it whispered silver clear;
It seemed to bid me bend the knee,

And yet it gently breathed to me
This word, as sweet as word can be:
'To-morrow morning shalt thou find
A work befitting humbled mind;
Have mercy on thy fellow men,
And enter into peace agen.'"

XXXII

Such was the Ocean Vagrant's tale,
A story like some ghostly wail
From awful torture-chambers, built
By mighty wrath for wondrous guilt,
Where yet a little hope remains
And struggling pinions shake the chains.
And when he ended it, a groan
Fulfilled the ponderous galleon,
As though the very ship did feel
Remorse from topmast down to keel.
Meanwhile that company of four,
The seekers after Holland shore,
Nor paled to hear, nor looked around,
As though it were familiar sound;
But harkened dumb, with drooping eyes
And humid cheeks and gentle sighs,
And shaking lips that prayed within,
Beseeching grace for stubborn sin:
The saddest human souls, I trow,
The wildest, weirdest in their woe,
That ever ploughed the rounded sea,
Or ever bowed the contrite knee.

XXXIII

Our hero, witnessing their sorrow,
Was moved to uttermost compassion,
And, judging their repentance thorough,
At once began in sequent fashion
To hum and haw such comfortings
As suited best his own emotion,
Without much questioning if things
Would work according to his notion.
"No doubt," he granted, "sin is awful,
An' your career has been unlawful.
You've kinder been ambition-bitten,
A leetle like old mother Britain,
An' wrought no eend of peccadilloes
In tearin' round to rule the billows.
I must allow you've raised a rumpus
About as big as chaps can compass.
You've mowed a mons'ous swath of trouble,
An' trampled feller men like stubble,
An' made your guilt appear the greater
By stickin' at it like all nater.
But change of heart an' change of goin'
Are also wuth a moment's showin'.
You've turned your back on lyin' Baalam
An' aimed your figger-head for Salem;
You've saved at least two feller mortals
From slippin' through the ghostly portals;
An' sence I've been a Yankee stormer
I never met a Dutch Reformer
Who seemed in penitence more hearty

Than you, includin' all your party,
From whence I draw a smart assurance
You've reely broke from Satan's durance
To seek a berth among the chosen,
With all aboard, from cook to boasun.

XXXIV

"Besides, I find a hopeful smatter
Of palliation in the matter.
Your past has kinder been your master
In sin as well as in disaster.
It grabbed you at the first beginnin',
Before you squarely thought of sinnin',
An' when it fairly got you under,
It dragged you down to blood an' plunder,
An' through a sort of necromancy,
That wasn't strictly to your fancy,
It made you grind a grist of evil,
For which I mainly blame the deevle.
In short, you've been predestinated
To walk the very road you hated;
An' therefore I should say for sartin
The surest way to do your cartin
An' find the marciful pertection
Would be the doctrine of election.
Election is Apollyon's horror;
It brimstones hell like old Gomorror,
An' raises scalds on Gog an' Magog
As broad acrost as Lake Umbagog,
An' scorches every imp to cinder
Who tries to chuck it out o' winder.

That doggamy is your reliance;
Astride of that you'll bid defiance
To terrors, doubts an' suchlike temptins';
An' when creation runs to emptins'
When all the tribes of men an' sperrits
Are jedged accordin' to their merits,
You'll see yourselves as high as any,
If Downing's word is worth a penny.

XXXV

"After your rough an tough probation
No doubt you'll find a consolation
In makin' sech a hahnsome showin'
While shootin' stars an trumpets blowin'
Reveal to every kind of Hessians
The emptiness of mere perfessions
Without a sure an' solid standin'
Upon the creed of Plymouth Landin'.
In that arousin' day the sinners
Won't keer for drinks before their dinners;
In vain they'll talk of keerds an' smokin',
An' try to brave it out by jokin';
They'll soon begin to want a shelter
An' start for cover helter-skelter.
With graves ajar beneath their noses
An' saints a-shinin' round like Moses,
How they will jump an' dodge an' travel
To keep from slumpin' under gravel,
An scoot acrost lots limber-jinted
Whichever way their snoots are pinted,

But tucker out at last, an' foller
Apollyon down to Brimstone Holler!*
But you, the children of election,
Ordained to keep the right direction,
Or only sidlin' out by seasons
For practical an' pressin' reasons
(As granthers, when the way is stony,
Take medder paths, to spare the pony)
You, knowin' well your sartin callin',
Won't mind to see the skies a-fallin';
You'll stand around as stiff as steeples,
An' mayhap jedge some casyal peoples."

XXXVI

To suchlike cheering talk our chief
Did treat these patient sons of grief,
Whereof he babbled knowing little,
But holding every jot and tittle;
For while he never once debated
But Hell would swallow those he hated,
He thought that whoso roused his pity
Would smoothly reach the golden city;
And doubtless he foreshadowed certain
Exhorters now before the curtain,
Who, whether orthodox or arian,
Are certainly humanitarian.

* For a similar sermon, by a Georgian camp-meeting exhorter, see the New York *Independent* of July 12, 1873. Diversity of time and place cannot mar the unity of genius.

Yet being practical in mind,
And by orig'nal sin inclined
To spice his theologic quirks
With Satan's sauce of goodly works;
As, also, bearing great affection
To martial modes of intellection
(For instance, loving much to pour
His views along a rifle's bore)
He shortly ceased to prate about
The topics fate has wrapped in doubt,
And begged his hosts to take in hand
The alien swarms who plagued our land.
With fervent Yankee zeal he prayed
The Flying Hollanders to raid
Britannic Majesty's possessions;
Or, failing this, to mount the Hessians
And sink the wizard fleets that drew
Their legions over Neptune's blue;
Or, missing these, to make a run
In search of Freedom's setting sun
And garb our needy continentals
In mediaeval regimentals.
Ah, moment lost! If Downing might
Have won these ancient men to fight,
Brittania's unicorn had sunk
Beneath their veteran skill and spunk.

XXXVII

Betimes our worthy chieftain strolled
In wonder through the rover's hold,
Surveying riches manifold:

A spoil of Afric shells and whorls;
Embroidered bags of Persian pearls;
Cathayan pipes with ivory stems;
Arabian falchions sheathed in gems;
The glossy bars of an argent mine,
And caskets brimmed with brilliants fine;
A hundred leathern sacks, or more,
Of gold in sequins, gold in ore;
Sandal coffers of Indian shawls;
Ebony thrones from Java's halls;
Opulent bales of silver braid
And sheeny silk and stiff brocade;
The spice and gums and healing balms
Of sunny islands clothed in palms;
While aloes, frankincense and cloves
Exhaled a steam of tropic groves.
All these he saw and coveted.
For Downing? No! No miser he!
He sued for starving ranks that bled
In shoonless feet beyond the sea.
Yea, high and noble were his longings
To raise a loan on these belongings,
And pay our troops in money minted,
Instead of money merely printed.
But no! The Wanderer of Time
Had done with battle's flame and grime.
In vain might glory's trumpet sound;
He answered, "I am homeward bound,"
And, speaking thus, would calmly raise
His brow with such a far-off gaze

As often glorifies the eye
Of mortal who is near to die.
  Moreover, Downing's child began
To love this sorrow-hunted man,
As angels love a mourning soul;
So tender-swift to spare him dole
That ever, when her sire might dare
Renew his plea for martial ware
She checked his zeal with silent prayer;
She hushed him, though he never heard
From those seraphic lips a word.
  So, onward over shining seas,
Without a sail, against the breeze,
The lonely, wizard vessel flew,
No longer thrust before a crew
Of tempest-fiends, but gently pressed
From hailing crest to hailing crest
By loving wings unseen of men.
The very galleon seemed to ken
That now at last she neared her home
And presently might cease to roam;
For all about her prow she sang,
And carols round her rudder rang,
And every rope had tuneful lips;
She was the joyfullest of ships
That ever ploughed a gladsome wave,
Although she flew to find a grave.

XXXVIII

The morning came, the last of moil
For those who sought their natal soil;
And, through the filmy wraiths that drave
In shoals from steely wave to wave,
They sighted Holland's seaward bounds,
Her endless dikes, her misty sounds;
And stealing on from shape to shape,
By yawning bight and crawling cape,
Anon they plainly spied afar
A tangled wood of mast and spar,
Displaying flags of all mankind,
With roofs in thousands ranked behind.
While here and yonder lofty spires
Uplifted psalms from brazen lyres,
Carilloning o'er earth and sea
That queènly city's jubilee.

And this was Amsterdam. Her sails
Were all around them. Marvelling hails
Pursued and met these otherworld
Vikings veering with canvas furled
And flaunting flags of ages gone.
They answered not; they speeded on,
All landward gazing; every eye
Intent with yearning hope to spy
A shape familiar to its gaze,—
A ghost, at least, of other days;
Intent perchance to find a spot
Where lasting quiet might be got,
The peace that man nor cyclone stirs
The restful peace of sepulchres.

XXXIX

But nearing now their longed for goal,
A ghostly transformation stole
Athwart these searchers after land.
A mighty spell, a spectral hand,
Perchance the fume of earthly airs,
Unbraced the kindly, tender snares
Of miracle that held them young;
And all the bygone years that hung
Above them fluttered down; and they
Were smitten wrinkled, bent and grey.
A froth of silver overrolled
The captain's wealth of curling gold,
And furrows crept adown his cheek,
And palsy made his stoutness meek.
The rounded grace and rosebud hue
Of fair Cornelie Vanderloo
Fell tremulous and white and spare
As lated stars in morning's glare.
From breath to breath the awful change
Increased in might, took wider range,
Pervaded spirit, blood and bone,
And swiftly laid the strongest prone.
Erelong the leader stood alone,
With agèd head in meekness bent,
And prayed, "Receive us! we repent."
One moment stood with lifted face;
One moment claimed the Heavenly grace;
Then sate, nor quitted more his place.
Cornelie, now a withered dame,

Embraced with tears the shrunken frame
Of him whose fated nuptial band
For ages gemmed her living hand,
Both bowing heads of silver hair
And moving ashen lips in prayer.
The greybeard sailors, ghostly pale
And shaking, leaned against the rail,
Or feebly fumbled tools of rust
And cordage crumbling into dust.
For all the galleon was fraught
With swift decadence into naught;
The sails were dropping mould and blight;
The spars blew off in slivers white;
The oaken sides and bolted deck
Relaxed to flimsy, yawning wreck;
Each onward fathom tow'rd the quay.
Wrought lustres, cycles, of decay.

XL

Then Esther Downing, weeping, cried:
"O arms of mercy, open wide!"
But quickly turned her piteous stare
On Vanderdecken, blanching there,
And watched him with the stony eye,
Of one who sees her dearest die.
Her father, gazing where she signed,
Beheld the fated chief reclined,
As white as man already dead,
His breath a sigh, his vision fled,
But glad in all his patient face,

Like one who fainting wins the race;
While close beside, companions still
As when they followed him in ill,
His kinsmen paled in mortal chill;
And farther on, in groups of death,
His sailors gasped away their breath;
All waning into swift eclipse,
Yet wearing on their pallid lips
The gentle, thankful smile of those
Who enter joy through gates of woes.
So much the father saw; and then
He fled before those ghastly men.
He caught his child within his arm
And burst away in mad alarm;
He crossed the sways and vanishings
And dusty whirls of fading things;
And, leaping ere the bulwark broke,
Fell gasping-dumb 'mid living folk,
A city trampling, all a-stare,
To see a galleon melt in air.

XLI

The vessel followed him; it stole
In silence on; it touched the mole
With gentle rustle, like to moss,
Or fungus sprays, or thistle floss,
A sigh of ruin barely heard,
Though never starer murmured word.
Arising, Downing turned to gaze,
But only spied a drowsy haze

Of ashy motes and filmy scales
In place of hull and masts and sails.
Inert and pale it towered high;
One solemn moment stained the sky;
Then slowly into distance waned,
And when it vanished, naught remained;
The ocean-pest had ceased to roam;
The voyagers had found their home.
But e'en to that upstaring throng
Descended grateful drifts of song,
The chorusings of raptured sprites
Already nearing Eden's heights;
To whom replied a welcome-psalm
From courts of golden crown and palm.
  Then, peering downward through the tide
Of verdant crystal, men espied
A pulverous settling, frail as dawn,
That glimmered, shuddered, and was gone.
Thin waters, woven through with braid
Of trembling sunbeams, overlaid
The formless, stagnant residue
Of one whom every tempest knew.
  So endeth oft the noblest plan
Of life's mysterious vagrant, Man.
He struggles long with hostile waves;
He triumphs, calls the winds his slaves;
He hastens, thinking not to drown,
And, shouting, "Land!" goes swiftly down.

XLII

Our chief in marvel raised his head,
"At least it fetched us here," he said;
"And that is sartinly a sign
That Goodness favors our design."
Thereon he rived the burgher jam
And calmly entered Amsterdam.
But scarcely had he bent his feet
To thread a dusky, devious street,
With lofty fronts on either hand,
The quaintest mortal ever planned,
Ere one who passed him in the fry,
On tiptoe wheeled with bulging eye,
And shooting forth a bony wrist,
Commenced to shake his honored fist,
Salaaming all the while in tone
And dialect like Downing's own.
Our hero turned, in vast amaze
At Yankee speech in Holland ways.
He turned and saw a longlimbed man
As lean and limber as rattan,
With lanky hair and hollow cheek
And quizzing lips and sharpened beak,
Who seemed to his delighted eyes
An angel sent from downeast skies.
In songful drawl the stranger spake:
"I ruther guess there's no mistake
About your being Shiloh's lion,
The chap who saved our Yankee Zion."
Then, ramming fists in trouser-pockets,

He spouted tidings bright as rockets;
Rehearsing how the bird of freedom
Had ripped the sawdust out of Edom
And hustled every bull of Bashan
Across the bounds of all creation;
By which he meant our sires had smitten
The hosts of Hessiandom and Britain,
And won for Downing and descendants
The stars and stripes of independence.

XLIII

Our hero smiled with satisfaction,
But promptly turned his thoughts to action.
He rang the bells, convened the city,
And made a speech, a loan, a treaty:
Then, striking out some Yankee notion
(Unknown to us) of crossing ocean,
He turned his back on plans of slaughter
And journeyed home with gun and daughter.
Thus fortuned it that Shiloh's hero
Reduced no Hessian states to Zero,
But hammered ploughshares from his sabre
And settled down to farming labor.
Ah, who could trust the weird narration
If Downing did not mean a nation,
Our Yankee wit and brawn and bravery,
Our hate of Beelzebub and slavery!

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